SPECIAL TIME EDITION

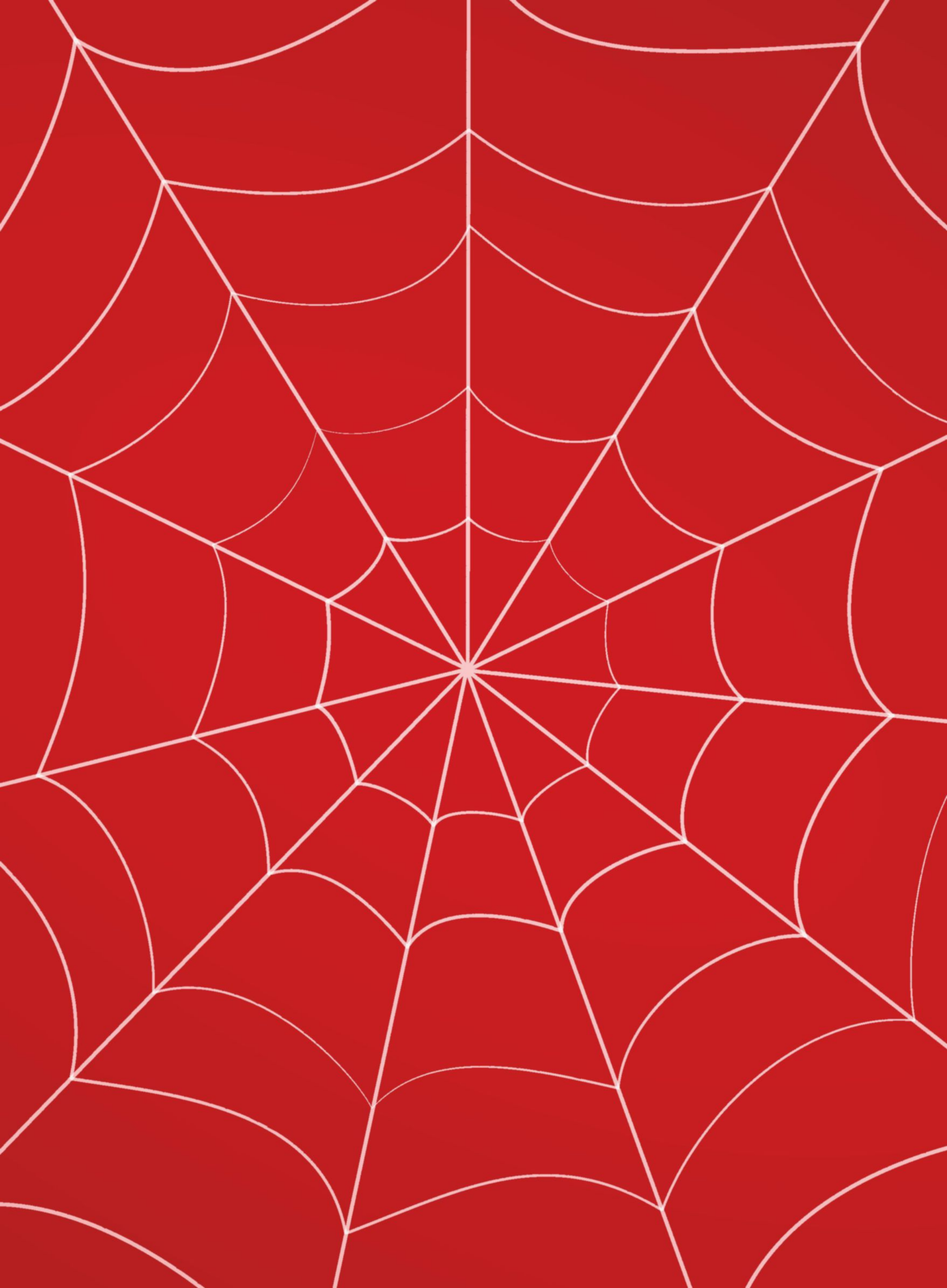
SPIDER-MAN

His Amazing Journey

First Adventures to Brand New Days

Power. Responsibility.

A Hero for All Ages



TIME

SPIDER-MAN

OF COURSE, YOU OLD FOOL, HE'S BEEN--
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
No. 78 WEEK ENDING AUGUST 10, 1974
NO MATTER WHAT THESE KIDS DO... I CAN'T STRIKE BACK AGAINST THEM!
I CAN'T! I CAN'T!!
WAR NO MORE
SUPER SPIDER-MA
AND
CAPTAIN BRIT
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
NO. 248
WEEK ENDING NOV. 9, 1977
AT LAST!
THE FINAL DEADLY SHOWDOWN!
JOURNEY TO HIGH ADVENTURE WITH THE MIGHTY
SPIDER-MA
COMICS W
No. 74 WEEK ENDING JULY 13, 1974

WEEKLY
No. 77 WEEK ENDING AUGUST 3, 1974
RISIS THE PUS!
10P
AN
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THOSE STUDENTS-- HOW CAN I CONVINCE THEM THAT THEY'RE IN DANGER FROM THE DEADLIEST MENACE OF ALL?
SIDE: ACTION GALORE WITH IRON MA
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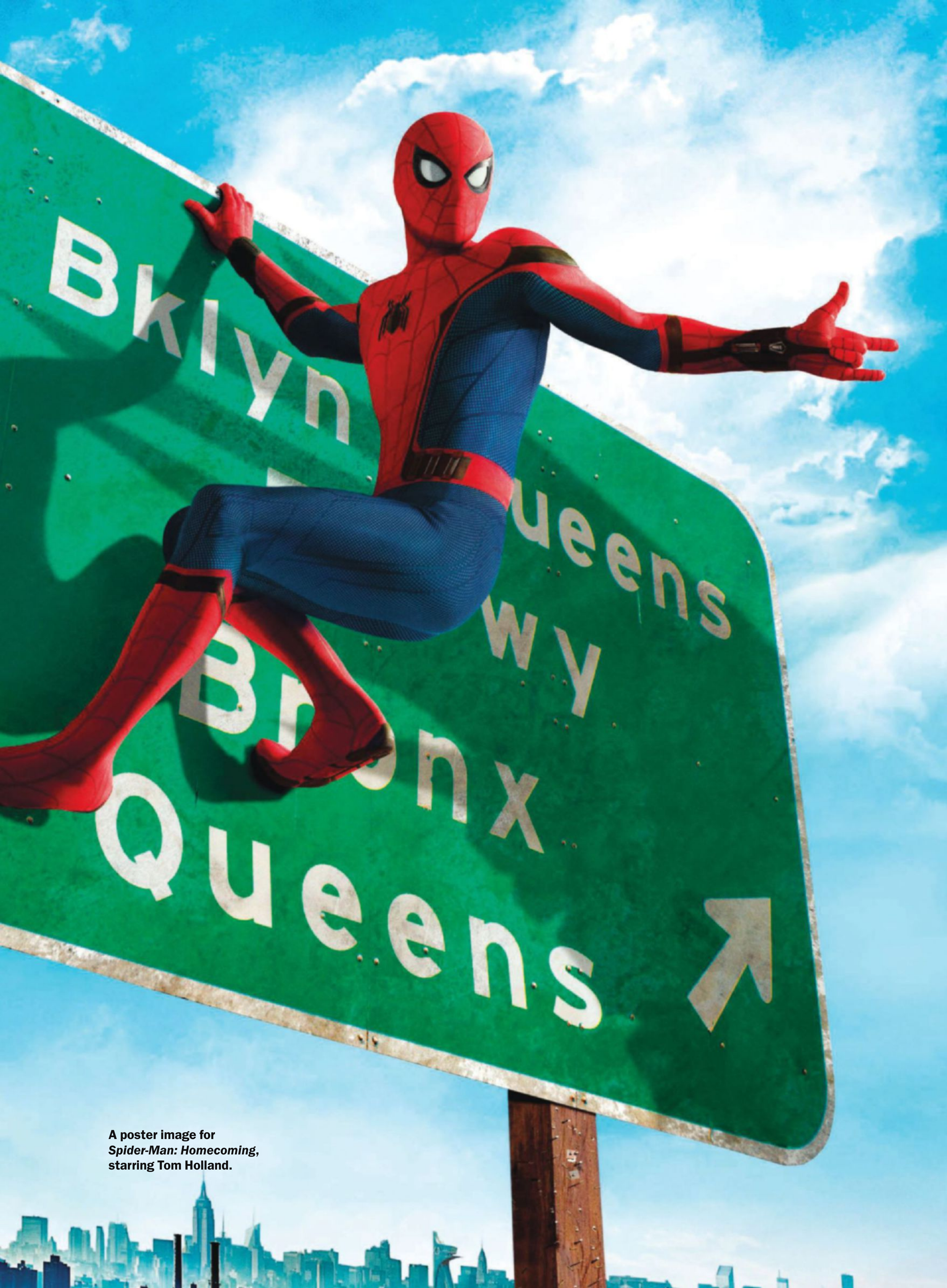

Bklyn
Queens
Pwy
Bronx
Queens

A poster image for *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, starring Tom Holland.

BOY FROM QUEENS MAKES GOOD

Peter Parker has enjoyed an amazing run in his 60-plus years as everyone's favorite friendly neighborhood superhero, Spider-Man.

BY CHRIS NASHAWATY

When Stan Lee and Steve Ditko first introduced Spider-Man in *Amazing Fantasy* #15 in 1962, superheroes were typically square-jawed sculptures of virtue. They tended to be more mythic than mortal. But Peter Parker wasn't mythic. He was human—a skinny kid with problems readers could identify with. He was anxious and seemed to constantly worry about everything. He wasn't a jock, he wasn't popular. He was the kid who got picked on in the hallways and who rushed to finish his homework before Aunt May could start asking questions. He was relatable. He was us.

With that great power of relatability came great responsibility. And for the past six and a half decades, Marvel has been making good on that responsibility by keeping Peter Parker and his web-slinging alter ego at the front and center of popular culture for longtime fans as well as generation after generation of new ones. Not that Stan Lee ever saw any of this coming. When asked about the character's instant popularity back in the 1960s, Lee famously replied, "I never thought Spider-Man would become the worldwide icon that he is. I just hoped the books would sell and I'd keep my job."

By now, everyone knows Spider-Man's origin story. If you picked up this issue, chances are you can quote it like gospel. But it's worth recapping here briefly because it contains the secret behind the comic book character's timeless appeal. A radioactive spider bite grants Peter Parker, a nerdy teenager from Forest Hills, Queens, extraordinary abilities—strength, superhuman agility, lightning reflexes, the ability to cling to walls, and the occasional quippy one-liner. But it's not these newly acquired powers that define Peter, it's the consequences. The death of his Uncle Ben, brought about by Peter's moment of selfishness, becomes the emotional cornerstone of the character. Meanwhile, the lesson that "with great power comes great responsibility" isn't just a catchphrase, it's a moral stance that's guided Spider-Man through decades of storytelling.

What makes this origin so enduring is its simplicity and emotional weight. It isn't about saving the world, it's about failing someone you love and spending the rest of your life trying to atone for it. What could be more human than that? As Spider-Man swung from four-color comic book panels into animated television in the 1960s, the character began to change with the times. The 1967 small-screen Spider-Man cartoon introduced the character to a wider audience, including viewers who'd never stepped foot inside their local comics shop.

Kicking off each week with an infectiously jazzy theme song that permanently lodged itself in your brain, this Spidey was colorful, a bit campy, and charmingly G-rated. He felt a bit like an animated cousin of Adam West's TV Batman. But even with its giddy, light-as-a-feather tone, the essential truth of Spider-Man remained intact. He was an Everykid hero leading a double life, juggling his personal problems with his calling to the greater good.

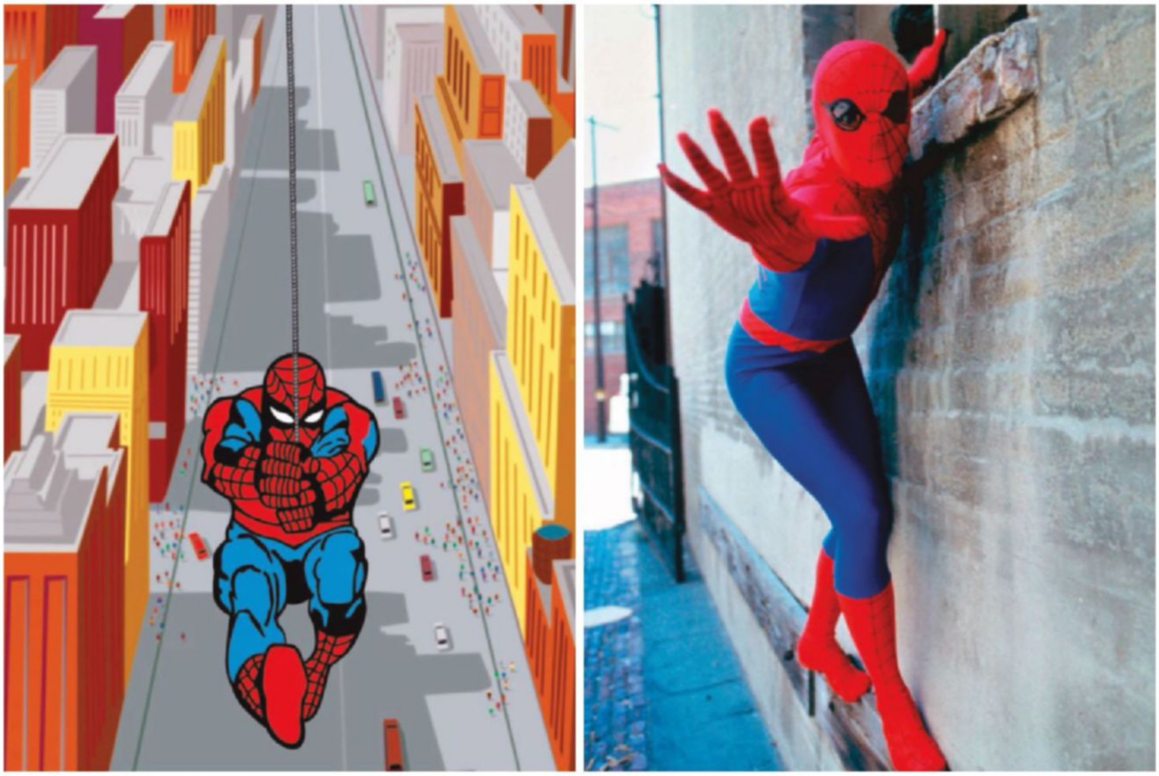
In the 1990s, the character found new depth in *Spider-Man: The Animated Series*, a darker and more serialized interpretation that treated Spider-Man's world with surprising emotional complexity. Villains had motivations, and relationships had consequences. For many now-grown fans, this series was their introduction to the character's expansive universe, from the Green Goblin to Venom, from Mary Jane to the multiverse. It felt less like a cartoon and more like an ongoing soap opera (with action!), the kind that ended up living rent-free in your imagination long after the episode—and the series—ended.

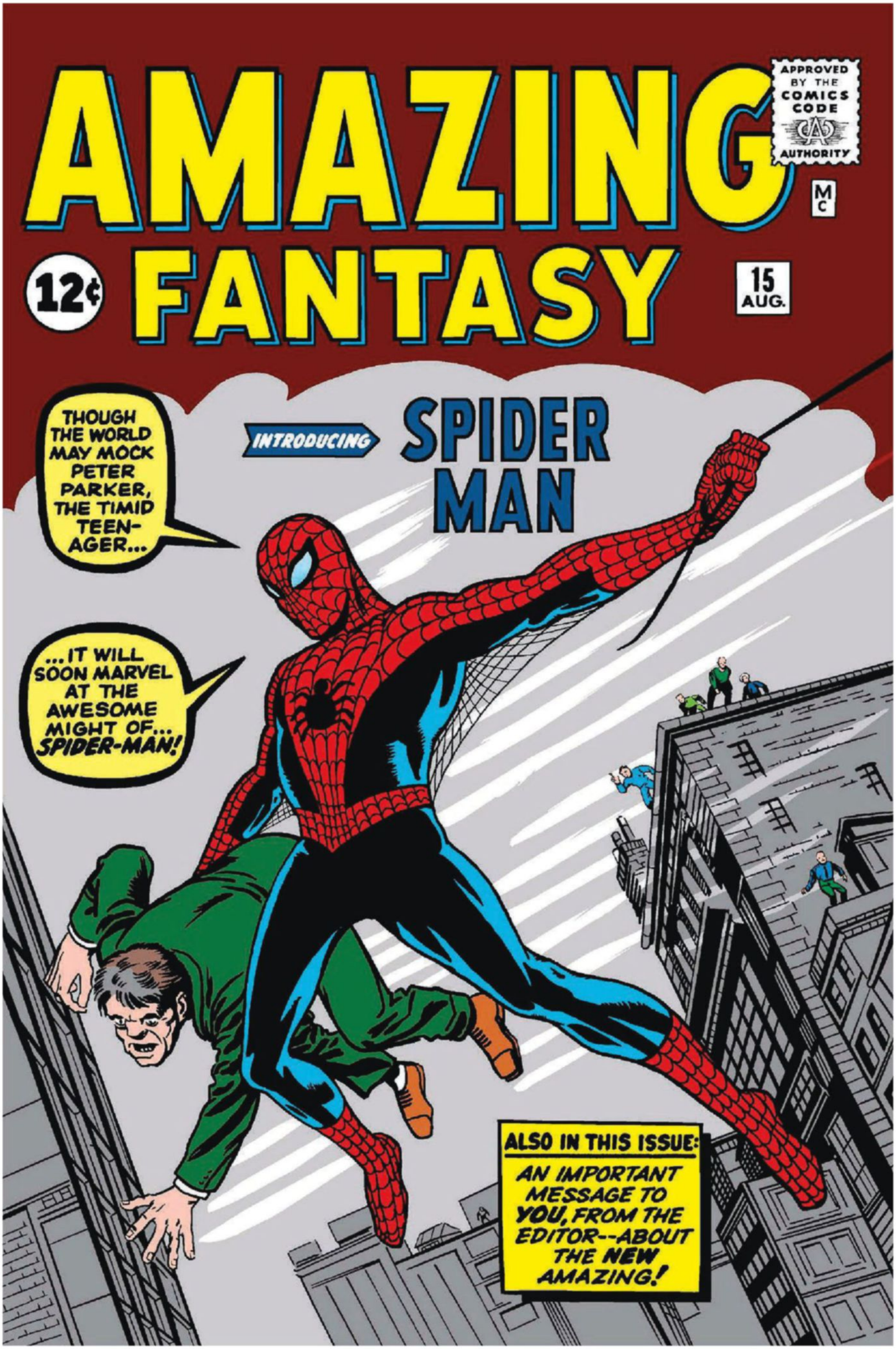
All of that, however, would eventually feel like a quaint prologue to what came next. Spider-Man's leap to the big screen in 2002 was a seismic event in popular culture—not just in the United States, but around the globe. Mischievous merry-prankster director Sam Raimi would be the one to finally bring Peter & Company to the multiplex, with *Spider-Man*. It changed the playbook at every Hollywood studio overnight.

Superhero movies existed before Raimi's *Spider-Man*, but this felt different. Thanks to a smart and poignant script from clever tentpole confectioner David Koepp, this popcorn blockbuster blended comic book spectacle with human drama perfectly. Tobey Maguire's note-perfect portrayal of Peter Parker captured the character's vulnerability, awkwardness and quiet heroism.

Two years later, with 2004's *Spider-Man 2*, Raimi raised the bar, conjuring an instant classic that many diehards still consider to be one of the greatest

Spidey in ABC's animated series, *Spider-Man*, left, and in the 1970s live-action series *The Amazing Spider-Man.* Opposite, Spider-Man's comics debut.




AMAZING FANTASY
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MC
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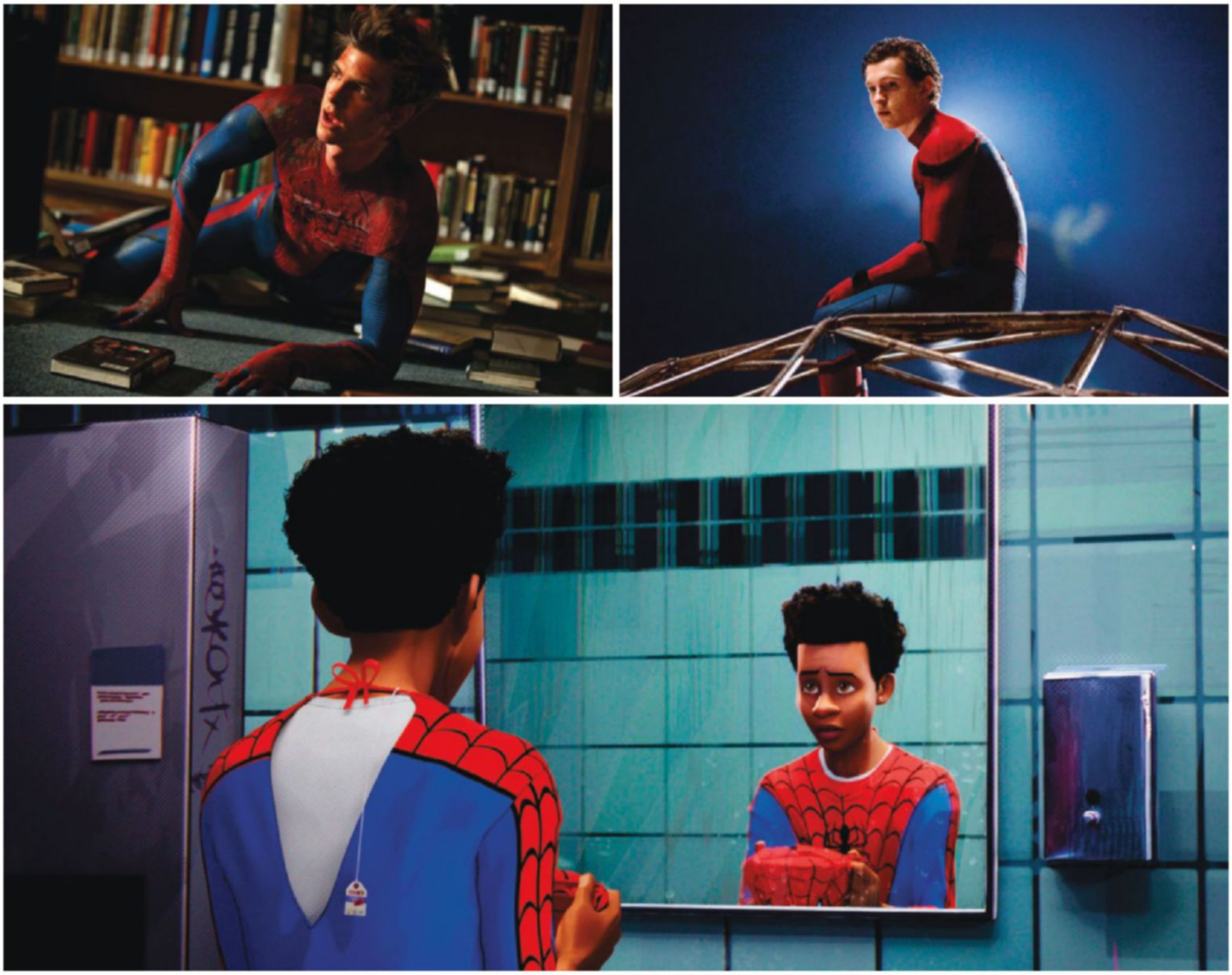
THOUGH THE WORLD MAY MOCK PETER PARKER, THE TIMID TEEN-AGER...
INTRODUCING SPIDER MAN
...IT WILL SOON MARVEL AT THE AWESOME MIGHT OF... SPIDER-MAN!
ALSO IN THIS ISSUE: AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO YOU, FROM THE EDITOR--ABOUT THE NEW AMAZING!

EACH VERSION OF SPIDER-MAN FEELS LIKE A DIFFERENT CHAPTER IN THE SAME STORY.

superhero movies ever made. Raimi and Maguire's sequel was about action, sure. But it was also about sacrifice. Peter Parker is stripped of his powers, struggles with love and questions whether being Spider-Man is worth the cost. It was a character study disguised as an Event Movie. It proved that superhero films could be emotionally rich, thematically complex and deeply personal.

Sure, swinging through concrete cityscapes like one of the Flying Wallendas is cool to watch on screen, but it's always been the emotional core of the Spidey saga that has kept Spider-Man relevant through a seemingly never-ending series of reboots. As with James Bond, each actor who has tackled the role of Peter has given the character his own spin. Andrew Garfield brought a more introspective and wounded air to the character in 2012's *The Amazing Spider-Man*, emphasizing Peter's loneliness and sense of loss. Tom Holland brought a youthful energy and guilelessness to the role in 2017's *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, also integrating him into the broader Marvel Cinematic Universe.

Each version of Spider-Man feels like a different chapter in the same story, reflecting its own specific cultural moment. Maguire's Spider-Man belonged to a post-9/11 era that valued sincerity and heroism. Garfield's Spider-Man captured the uncertainty and introspection of the early 2010s. Holland's Spider-



Clockwise from left, Spider-Men Tobey Maguire, Andrew Garfield and Tom Holland, and Miles Morales, voiced by Shameik Moore, in the animated Spider-Verse movies.

Man embodies the optimism and interconnected storytelling of the modern franchise-movie age.

That bloodline would continue and grow even stronger in 2018, with the unexpected critical and commercial success of *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*, an animated superhero fantasia that felt like a comic book come to life. By stepping into this Spider-Verse, fans could venture even deeper into the character's story via Miles Morales. Suddenly, there was a multiverse of possibilities. The film's vibrant color palette, heartfelt emotional beats and celebration of diversity redefined what superhero movies could look like—and who they could now speak to and represent.

Today, the impact of Lee and Ditko's creation extends far beyond comics and movies. Spider-Man represents a kind of heroism that feels life-size and attainable. He doesn't have the godlike powers of Superman or the dizzying wealth of Bruce Wayne. He just has his intelligence, courage and a sense of duty. He was, is and will continue to be the hero next door—the kid from Queens who just happens to save the world between classes. He's a global symbol of hope and resilience. He's a reminder that even the most ordinary person can make an extraordinary difference. On some level, everyone can understand what those things feel like. We are all Peter Parker now and Peter Parker is all of us. ●

IN
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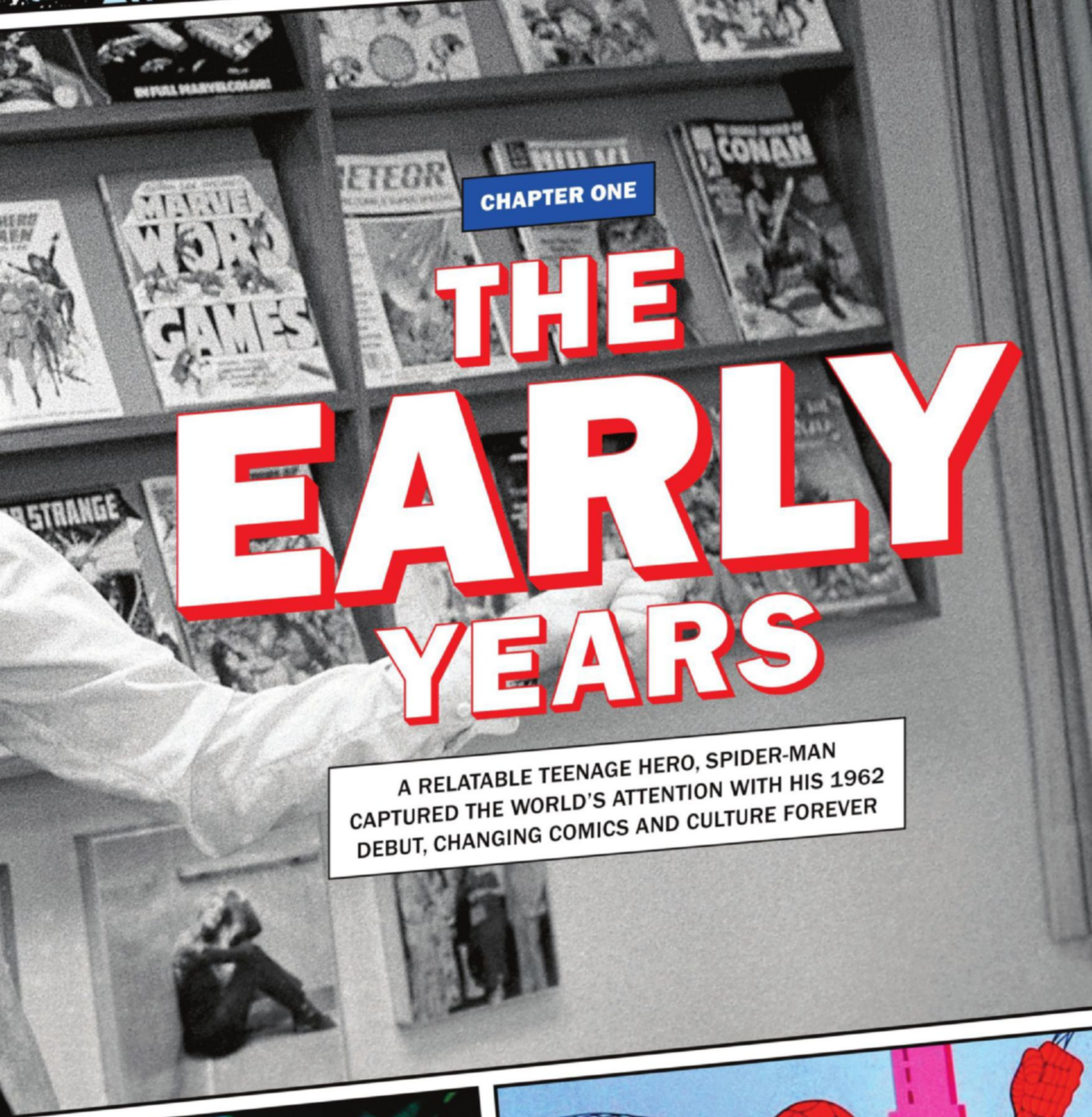

IN FULL MARVEL COLOR!
MARVEL WORD GAMES
CONAN
STRANGE

CHAPTER ONE

THE EARLY YEARS

A RELATABLE TEENAGE HERO, SPIDER-MAN CAPTURED THE WORLD'S ATTENTION WITH HIS 1962 DEBUT, CHANGING COMICS AND CULTURE FOREVER

THE MARVEL STORY
COMING AT YA!!
MARVEL
Five Fabulous Decades Of The World's Greatest Comics

Spidey's rapid ascent to comic book superstardom took everyone by surprise, even co-creator Stan Lee.

Five Fabulous Decades of the World's Greatest Comics
MARVEL
ES DANIELS

COMIC BOOK CAPERS

It took some wrangling, but once Spider-Man burst onto the scene, the unlikely teenage hero won over legions of fans with his countless colorful adventures.

BY JUSTIN KIRKLAND

IN THE EARLY 1960S, STAN LEE WALKED into Marvel publisher Martin Goodman's New York City office to pitch an idea for a new type of superhero. Instead of being a pillar of brawny machismo, the hero Lee had in mind was a scrawny teenager. And his origin story would be one that took place in your average, urban setting. He would, of course, fight supervillains, but he'd also navigate self-doubt and dating and other issues a teenager might face. And no, that didn't particularly sound like the popular superheroes that Lee had already introduced to the world—icons like the Hulk and the Fantastic Four—but this guy had potential all his own.

Oh, yeah. One more thing: he's also a spider. Or spider-like. The initial response from Goodman was . . . not what Lee had hoped for. But how poetic is it that the origin story of Spider-Man is an underdog's tale? That's the gist of Spider-Man, after all.

The mid-century brainchild of Marvel's brilliant Stan Lee and Steve Ditko, Spider-Man ushered in a whole new subgenre of comic book characters, upending the notion that a superhero could only be the prototypical muscle-bound character with a furrowed brow and otherworldly origins. What Lee and Ditko created was someone who felt like he could be reading the comic as well. They created a superhero that allowed readers to see themselves—and the creation and introduction of Spider-Man into the Marvel universe would change the trajectory of the comics giant forever.

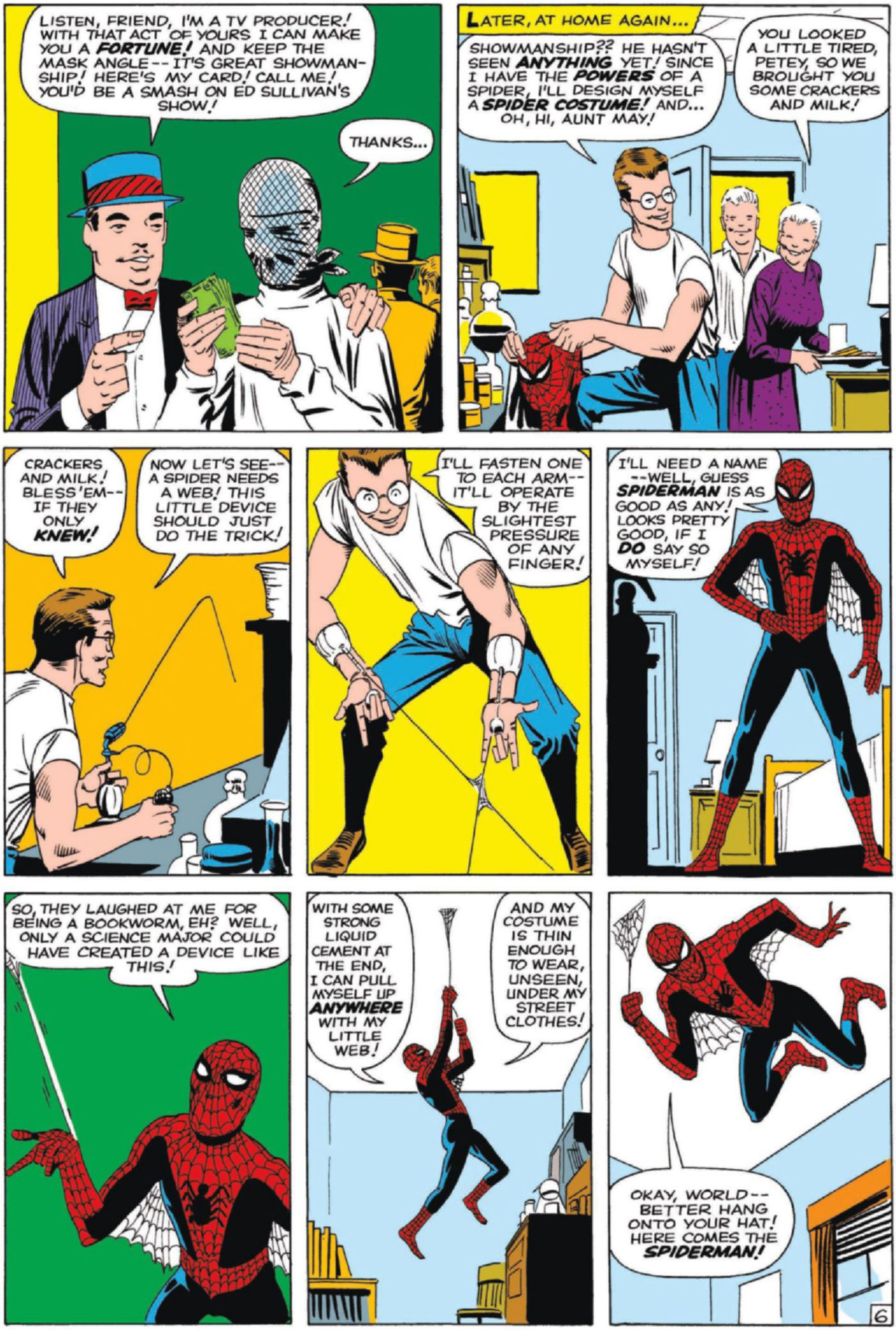
Perhaps it's Sally Kempton, writing for *The Village Voice* in 1965, who best sums up the strange reckoning Spider-Man brought forward. "How can a character as hopelessly healthy as Superman compete with this living symbol of the modern dilemma, this neurotic's neurotic, Spider-Man, the super-anti-hero of our time?"

Realizing the potential appeal of such a figure to the teenage audience who loved comic books, Lee, then Marvel editor in chief, couldn't shake the idea of a hero who stuck to walls and ceilings. Working with Goodman on the comic *Amazing Adult Fantasy*, he was determined to bring Spider-Man to the page, though it took some time to find the ideal name for the character—some early monikers to hit the cutting room floor included "Mosquito Man" and "Insect Man." Convinced he had a good idea on his hands, Lee held fast to the concept that his young hero should be someone readers could identify with.

In an interview with the *Chicago Tribune*, he said, "[Spider-Man is] the one who's most like me—nothing ever turns out 100 percent OK; he's got a lot of problems, and he does things wrong, and I can relate to that."

As for the exact nature of the character's super abilities, those were a work in progress requiring several drafts in order to arrive at the Spider-Man that Lee ultimately had imagined. *Pulp* magazine hero Spider certainly had an influence on what was

The reclusive Steve Ditko; opposite, Peter Parker makes his famous costume in *Amazing Fantasy* #15.


LISTEN, FRIEND, I'M A TV PRODUCER! WITH THAT ACT OF YOURS I CAN MAKE YOU A **FORTUNE!** AND KEEP THE MASK ANGLE -- IT'S GREAT SHOWMANSHIP! HERE'S MY CARD! CALL ME! YOU'D BE A SMASH ON ED SULLIVAN'S SHOW!
THANKS...
LATER, AT HOME AGAIN...
SHOWMANSHIP?? HE HASN'T SEEN **ANYTHING** YET! SINCE I HAVE THE **POWERS** OF A SPIDER, I'LL DESIGN MYSELF A **SPIDER COSTUME!** AND... OH, HI, AUNT MAY!
YOU LOOKED A LITTLE TIRED, PETEY, SO WE BROUGHT YOU SOME CRACKERS AND MILK!
CRACKERS AND MILK! BLESS 'EM -- IF THEY ONLY **KNEW!**
NOW LET'S SEE -- A SPIDER NEEDS A WEB! THIS LITTLE DEVICE SHOULD JUST DO THE TRICK!
I'LL FASTEN ONE TO EACH ARM -- IT'LL OPERATE BY THE SLIGHTEST PRESSURE OF ANY FINGER!
I'LL NEED A NAME -- WELL, GUESS **SPIDERMAN** IS AS GOOD AS ANY! LOOKS PRETTY GOOD, IF I **DO** SAY SO MYSELF!
SO, THEY LAUGHED AT ME FOR BEING A BOOKWORM, EH? WELL, ONLY A SCIENCE MAJOR COULD HAVE CREATED A DEVICE LIKE THIS!
WITH SOME STRONG LIQUID CEMENT AT THE END, I CAN PULL MYSELF UP **ANYWHERE** WITH MY LITTLE WEB!
AND MY COSTUME IS THIN ENOUGH TO WEAR, UNSEEN, UNDER MY STREET CLOTHES!
OKAY, WORLD -- BETTER HANG ONTO YOUR HAT! HERE COMES THE **SPIDERMAN!**
6

to come, as did Archie Comics' the Fly, but the inspiration that Lee mentions most often came from a moment of distraction: "I confessed that I had gotten the idea of watching a fly on the wall while I had been typing. (I can't remember if that was literally true or not, but I thought it would lend a little color to my pitch.)" The color was not as amusing to Goodman.

Not only did Goodman argue that a teenage character was better suited to be a sidekick, he also wasn't thrilled about the idea of creating a superhero from arachnid origins. Lee even noted in a 2005 interview that Goodman responded to the pitch with, "Stan, you can't give a hero the name Spider-Man. People hate spiders!" Unrattled, he continued his pitch, insisting that Spider-Man wasn't just a superhero, but a boy with teenage problems as well. "Martin said, 'Stan, don't you realize what a super-hero is? They don't have those kinds of problems.' So, you could see he wasn't totally thrilled with the notion of Spider-Man."

But Lee's persistence paid off. Goodman eventually gave in to his friend, allowing Lee his opportunity to introduce Spider-Man as a test case in the final issue of the *Amazing Adult Fantasy*, renamed *Amazing Fantasy* for its last printing. It then fell to Lee to find an artist to bring the character to life on the page.

> "NOTHING EVER TURNS OUT 100 PERCENT OK; HE'S GOT A LOT OF PROBLEMS."
>
> **—STAN LEE, ON SPIDEY**

Initially, he planned to tap longtime collaborator Jack Kirby, whose pen had crafted the likes of Thor and the Hulk. According to comic historian Greg Theakston, who worked with eventual artist Steve Ditko on *The Steve Ditko Reader*, Kirby and his creative partner, Joe Simon, had developed a similar concept to what Lee had in mind, focused on an orphaned boy who acquires superpowers via a magic ring. Kirby and Lee exchanged notes, and Kirby got to work on Lee's concept. However, when he presented his first renderings, Lee felt that they were still too much in line with the superheroes they'd created previously.

Ditko recalls a conversation he had with Lee about Kirby's approach, noting that Lee said, "I hated the way he was doing it. Not that he did it badly—it just wasn't the character I wanted; it was too heroic." Part of the appeal of Spider-Man, according to Lee, was that he wasn't those things. In the book *The Comic Book Makers*, Simon recalled, "Lee had been expecting a skinny young kid who is transformed into a skinny young kid with spider powers. Kirby had him turn into . . . Captain America with cobwebs."

That's when Spider-Man co-creator Ditko entered the picture. With Kirby only having produced a handful of pages, Lee replaced him with Ditko. In a 2002 essay, Ditko remembers getting the brief from Lee describing how he envisioned Spider-Man's appearance, his general aesthetic and the bit about the radioactive spider bite. Ditko then identified certain additional elements that felt integral to the character. Like a spider, he would need to have the power to cling to and climb walls. He also would require the ability to shoot webbing from his wrist. (Ditko originally envisioned the hero using a gun that shot spider webs.)

But the brilliance of Spider-Man's evolution is in the more nuanced details, and as Ditko designed Spider-Man and his suit, he had an idea of how to make the character even more of an Everyman figure. "I wasn't sure Stan would like the idea of covering the character's face, but I did it because it hid an obviously boyish face," Ditko writes. "It would also add mystery to the character and allow the reader/viewer the opportunity to visualize, to 'draw,' his own preferred expression on Peter Parker's face and, perhaps, become the personality behind the mask."

Ditko inked the entirety of the first Spidey comic in *Amazing Fantasy* #15, with the exception of the cover, which Kirby created. (Ditko was dubbed the "plotter" of the series.) In the issue, Peter Parker's story begins with the infamous spider bite that gives him powers, which he initially refuses to use to stop a thief. Hours later, the criminal he has let go is responsible for the death of his Uncle Ben, thus setting Spider-Man's story into motion. Little did Ditko and Lee know that a short line at the end of the story would come to define the series and Spider-Man forever: "... with great power there must also come—great responsibility!"

Spider-Man was an instant hit with readers, who snapped up copies of *Amazing Fantasy* #15—to this day the issue remains so storied and sought-after

Spider-Man engenders goodwill wherever he goes. Here, a volunteer dressed in the hero's costume helps Amanda McFadden read *The Denver Post* in 1982 as part of a student literacy program.

that a single copy once broke the record for most expensive comic book ever purchased. A near-mint-condition issue of Spider-Man's debut sold for $3.6 million in 2021, up from the original 12 cent cover price when it went on sale more than 60 years earlier.

Unsurprisingly, Lee and Ditko's newest creation quickly received his own series, *The Amazing Spider-Man*, which debuted in 1963. As Richard Harrington noted in *The Washington Post*, "With Spider-Man headlining Marvel's new gallery of heroes, sales of Marvel comic book titles exploded from 7 million copies in 1961 to 13 million in 1962, inaugurating the Silver Age of Comics—an era that has come to be known simply as 'The Marvel Age.'" And while Ditko and Lee only worked together on the first 38 issues before Ditko parted ways from Spider-Man in 1966, in that short time Ditko helped develop and introduce top-tier villains including Doctor Octopus, Green Goblin, Lizard and Sandman.

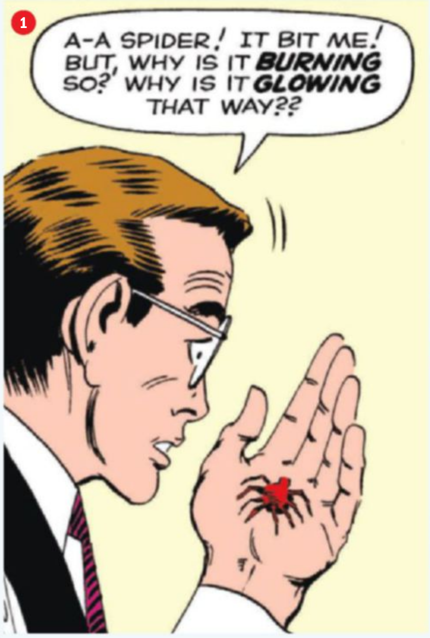
The Amazing Spider-Man is one of the longest-running continuously published comics, produced uninterrupted from 1963 to 1998. Since then, the series has continued on, with tweaks and shifts to the original publication's run, but even more than 60 years after Peter Parker's debut, Spider-Man remains a staple of the Marvel universe, proving that sometimes the most incredible stories can come from the most relatable heroes.

"It's so indescribably thrilling to realize that so many people really care about a character I dreamed up and wrote so many years ago," Lee said. "Although it's probably lucky I didn't know how big Spidey would become in later years—because, if I suspected that, I'd have been too nervous to write the stories, worrying if they're good enough for posterity to judge." ●

The Ultimate Timeline

Over more than 60 years, in print, on film and on TV, Spider-Man has been cloned, impersonated and married. He's even died and been resurrected. Here's a look at his artfully tangled web.

BY DOUGLAS WOLK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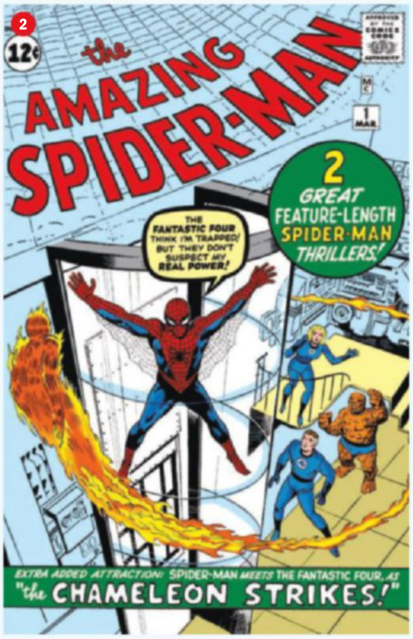
A-A SPIDER! IT BIT ME! BUT, WHY IS IT BURNING SO? WHY IS IT GLOWING THAT WAY??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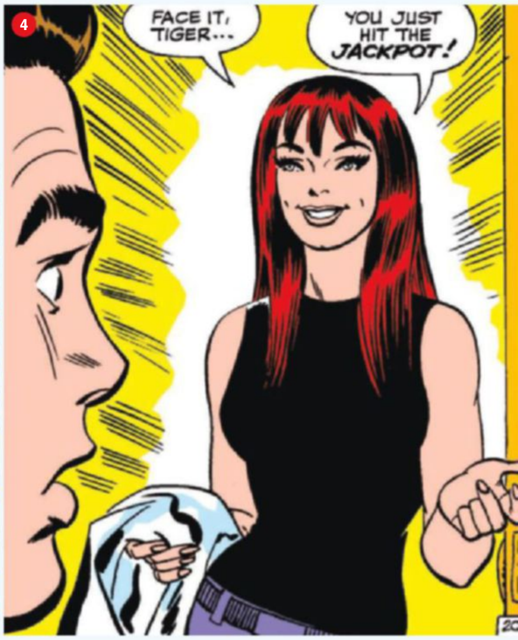
12¢
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
1 MAR
2 GREAT FEATURE-LENGTH SPIDER-MAN THRILLERS!
THE FANTASTIC FOUR THINK I'M TRAPPED! BUT THEY DON'T SUSPECT MY REAL POWER!
EXTRA ADDED ATTRACTION: SPIDER-MAN MEETS THE FANTASTIC FOUR, AS "the CHAMELEON STRIKES!"


4
FACE IT, TIGER...
YOU JUST HIT THE JACKPOT!

THE STORY BEGINS!

1962

1. Writer Stan Lee and artist Steve Ditko's anthology comic book *Amazing Adult Fantasy* ("The Magazine That Respects Your Intelligence") shortens its title to ***Amazing Fantasy*** for its final issue, #15. An 11-page story at the beginning of the issue introduces "Spiderman"—the hyphen appears only once, in its title—as well as Aunt May, Uncle Ben, Flash Thompson and the phrase "with great power there must also come—great responsibility!"

1963

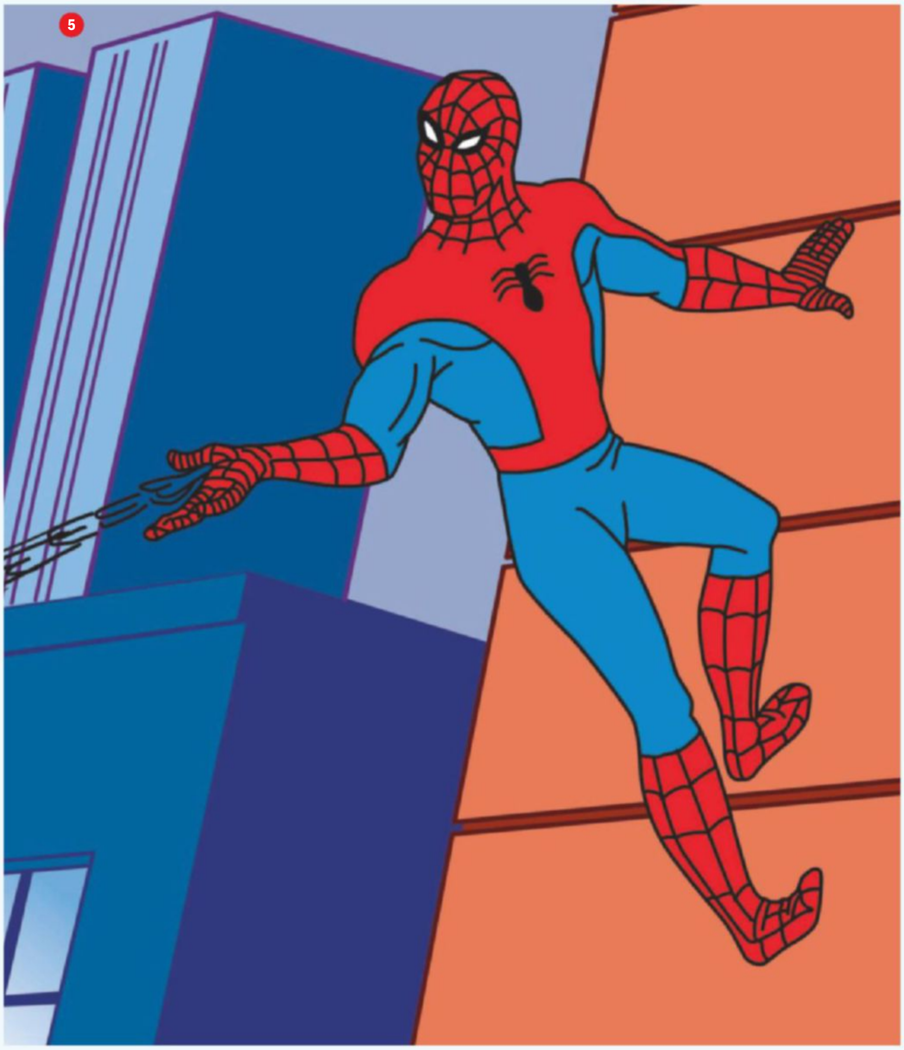
2. Seven months after Spidey's first appearance, the first issue of ***The Amazing Spider-Man*** is published (the same day as *Tales of Suspense* #39, which introduces Iron Man). On the cover he's been captured by the Fantastic Four; inside he meets J. Jonah Jameson and the villainous Chameleon.

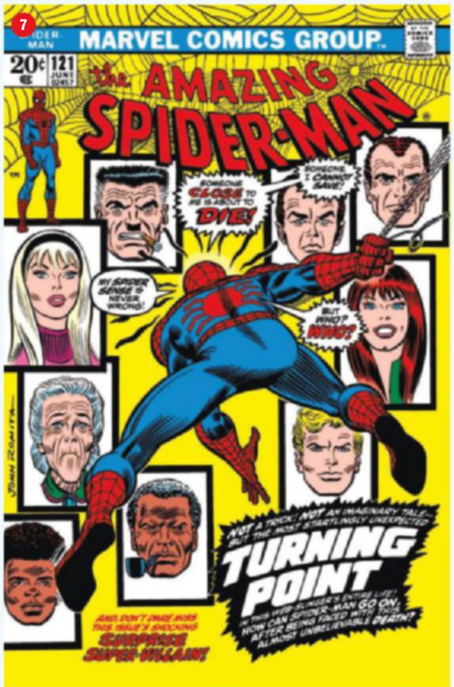
1965

3. Peter Parker graduates from Midtown High School, which is inexplicably not in midtown in Manhattan but in Forest Hills, Queens. Three months later Peter begins his first year (on a science scholarship) at Empire State University, in ***Amazing Spider-Man* #31,** which also introduces Gwen Stacy, Harry Osborn and Professor Miles Warren, aka the Jackal.

1966

4. Steve Ditko, who had been plotting Spider-Man's comics on his own for quite a while, abruptly leaves Marvel. *Amazing Spider-Man* #39, the first issue drawn by John Romita rather than Ditko, reveals that the Green Goblin is Norman Osborn, Harry's father. A two-year-long running joke of Peter dodging Aunt May's attempts to set him up with her friend's niece pays off in #42, when statuesque redhead **Mary Jane Watson** appears at his door.

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MARVEL COMICS GROUP
20¢
121
JUNE
the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
SOMEONE CLOSE TO ME IS ABOUT TO DIE!
SOMEONE I CANNOT SAVE!
MY SPIDER SENSE IS NEVER WRONG!
BUT WHO? WHO?
JOHN ROMITA
NOT A TRICK! NOT AN IMAGINARY TALE-- BUT THE MOST STARTLINGLY UNEXPECTED
TURNING POINT
IN THIS WEB-SLINGER'S ENTIRE LIFE! HOW CAN SPIDER-MAN GO ON, AFTER BEING FACED WITH THIS ALMOST UNBELIEVABLE DEATH?
AND DON'T DARE MISS THIS ISSUE'S SHOCKING SURPRISE SUPER-VILLAIN!

1967

5. The **animated Spider-Man TV show** begins. Its theme song ("…does whatever a spider can…) has been stuck in everyone's head since. Meanwhile, Wilson Fisk, the villainous Kingpin, debuts in *Amazing Spider-Man* #50.

1972

6. *Amazing Spider-Man* #111 introduces the series' new writer, **Gerry Conway,** an actual teenager: He's 19 at the time and goes on to write more than 100 issues of various Spider-Man titles.

1973

7. The Green Goblin murders Peter Parker's girlfriend, Gwen Stacy, in ***Amazing Spider-Man* #121**—and dies himself in the following issue. The editors of the series' Mexican edition, *El Sorprendente Hombre-Araña*, commission dozens of original stories, apparently to avoid reprinting Gwen's death.

1974

8. "Spidey Super Stories," a series of live-action skits in which Spider-Man's "dialogue" appears only as word balloons, debuts on the children's TV show ***The Electric Company***; the tie-in *Spidey Super Stories* comic book runs for eight years. Meanwhile, the Punisher debuts in ***The Amazing Spider-Man* #129,** and two issues later Aunt May nearly marries Doctor Octopus.

1975

9. The concept album ***Spider-Man: Rock Reflections of a Superhero*** appears. It includes songs like "No One's Got a Crush on Peter" and "Gwendolyn," and between-song narration by Stan Lee. Despite its back-cover artwork, it doesn't actually feature Black Panther on guitar or the Hulk on drums. Gerry Conway ends his initial run of Spider-Man comics with a story in which a clone of Spider-Man appears and (apparently) dies.

1976

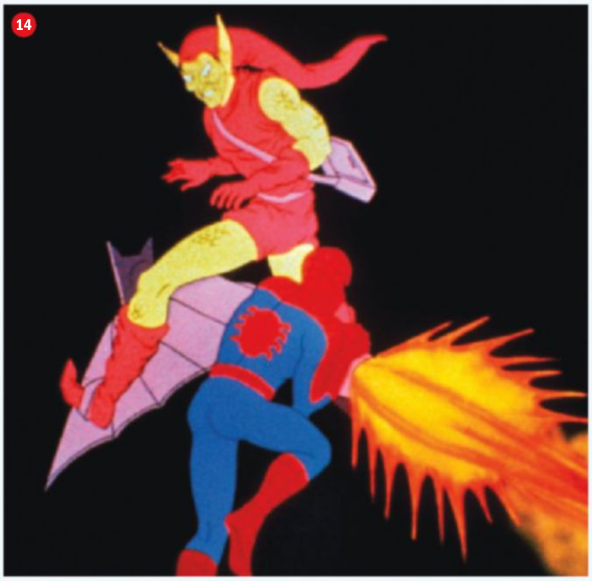
10. Marvel and DC Comics join forces to produce their first intercompany crossover, ***Superman vs. the Amazing Spider-Man.*** Spidey gets a second monthly solo comic book: ***Peter Parker, the Spectacular Spider-Man,*** which lasts 263 issues.

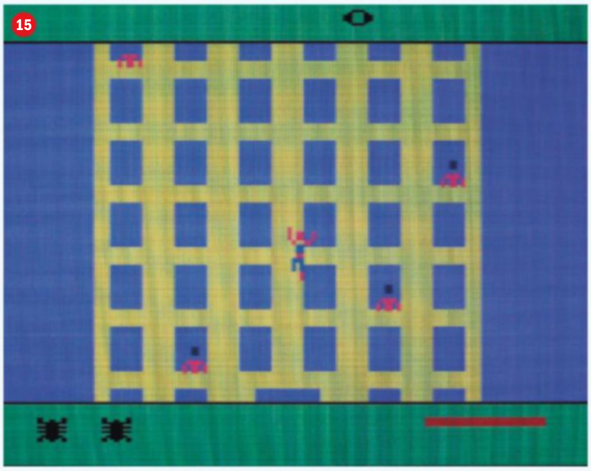
1977

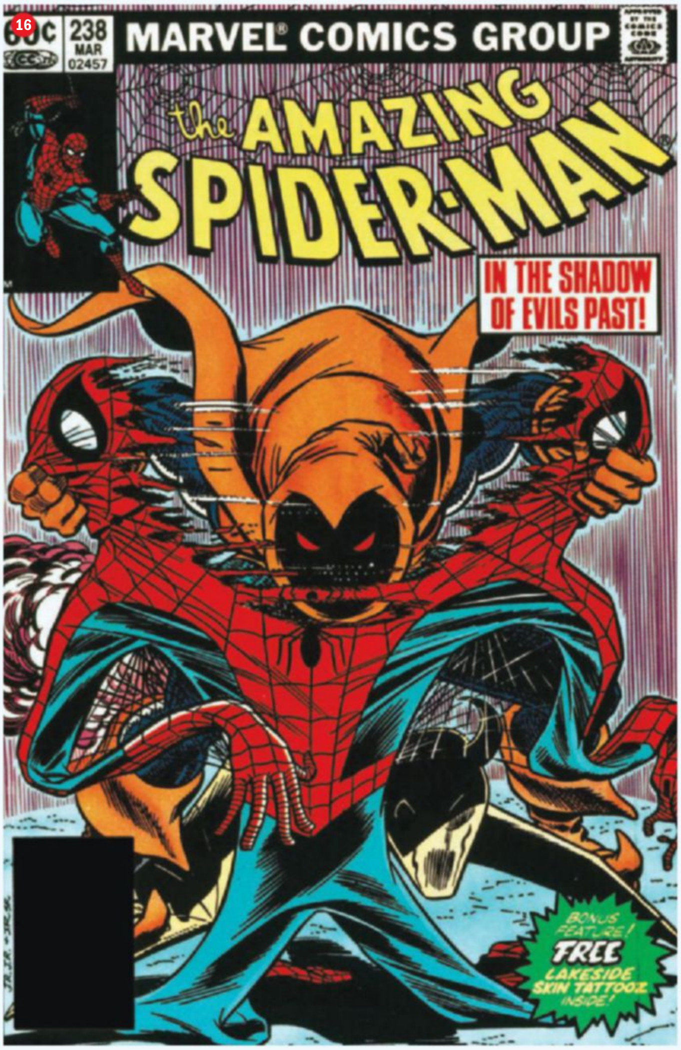
11. A live-action TV series, ***The Amazing Spider-Man,*** starring Nicholas Hammond, debuts. It runs for two brief seasons; the pilot episode is released in theaters overseas. The daily ***Amazing Spider-Man*** newspaper strip, initially by Stan Lee and John Romita, begins its 42-year run. Spider-Woman makes her first appearance in ***Marvel Spotlight #32.***

1978

12. The Japanese TV series ***Supaidaman*** begins. It stars Shinji Todo as Takuya Yamashiro, a monster-fighting hero who has received his superpowers from a warrior from Planet Spider and pilots a spaceship called the *Marveller* that transforms into a giant robot called Leopardon. He does have the same costume as Peter Parker, though. In ***Amazing Spider-Man #185,*** Peter is supposed to graduate from college but is missing a required gym credit.



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238
MAR
02457
MARVEL COMICS GROUP
the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
IN THE SHADOW OF EVILS PAST!
BONUS FEATURE! FREE LAKESIDE SKIN TATTOOZ INSIDE!

1979

13. The Black Cat, Spider-Man's occasional nemesis and frequent FWB, debuts in ***Amazing Spider-Man* #194.** The next issue, Peter Parker learns that Aunt May has died. (Five issues later, it turns out Mysterio faked her death.)

1981

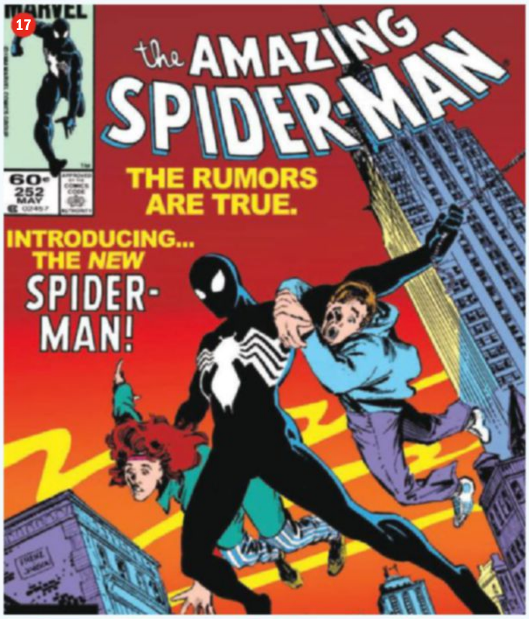
14. Two new animated Spidey TV series appear: the syndicated ***Spider-Man*** and NBC's ***Spider-Man and His Amazing Friends.*** The latter also features Iceman, a longtime character in X-Men comics, and Firestar, who was created for the show.

1982

15. *Spider-Man,* a vertical scroller for the Atari 2600 console, is the first Spidey video game. Programmed entirely by Laura Nikolich, it involves the web-swinger climbing buildings and avoiding the Green Goblin's pumpkin bombs.

1983

16. *Amazing Spider-Man* #238 introduces a new archenemy, the Hobgoblin. The mystery of the Hobgoblin's true identity is compounded over the next few years by Spider-Man writers and editors disagreeing about what that true identity should be. The one-off comic ***Marvel Tails*** introduces Peter Porker, aka Spider-Ham, a joke that turns out to be more durable than anyone would have guessed.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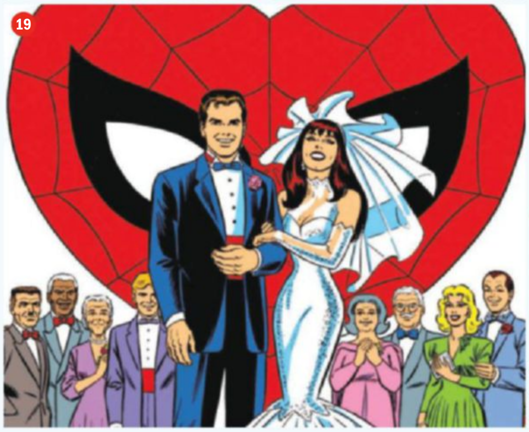
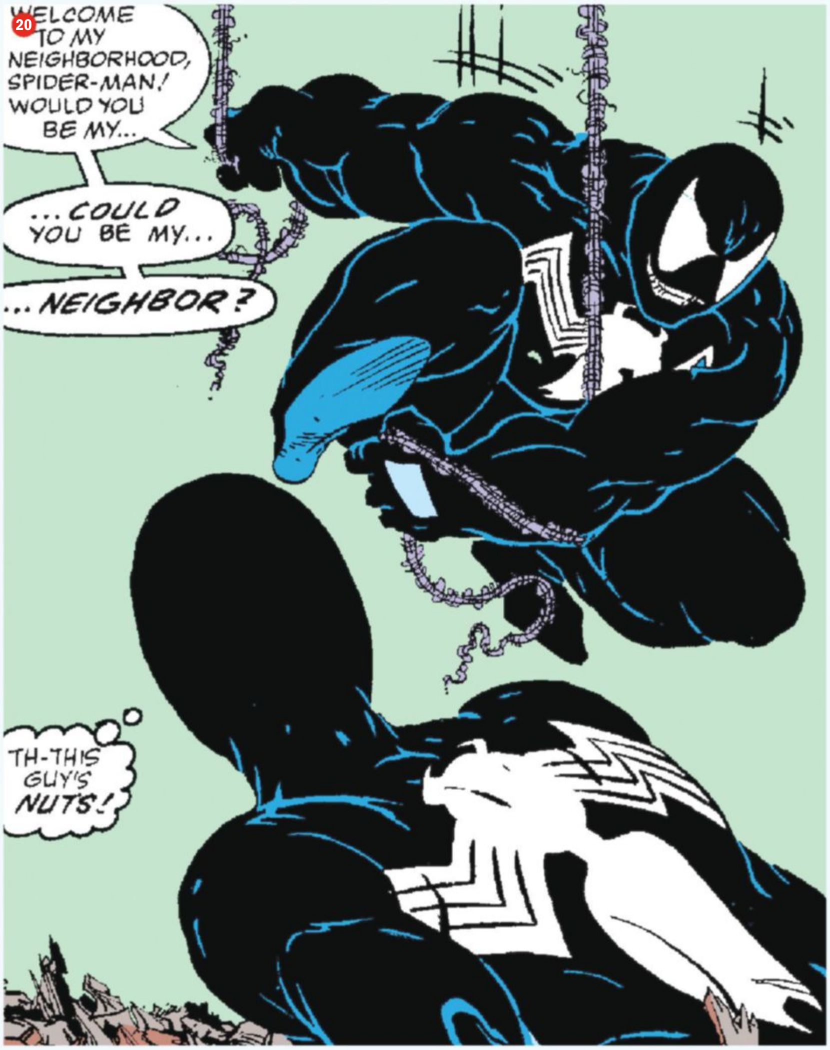
MARVEL
the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN
60¢
252
MAY
THE RUMORS ARE TRUE.
INTRODUCING... THE NEW SPIDER-MAN!




20
WELCOME TO MY NEIGHBORHOOD, SPIDER-MAN! WOULD YOU BE MY...
...COULD YOU BE MY...
...NEIGHBOR?
TH-THIS GUY'S NUTS!

1984

17. Spider-Man gets a new costume: solid black with a white spider design—much easier to draw than the familiar red-and-blue-and-webs look—in ***Amazing Spider-Man* #252.** The black costume, it eventually turns out, is secretly a malevolent alien symbiote.

1985

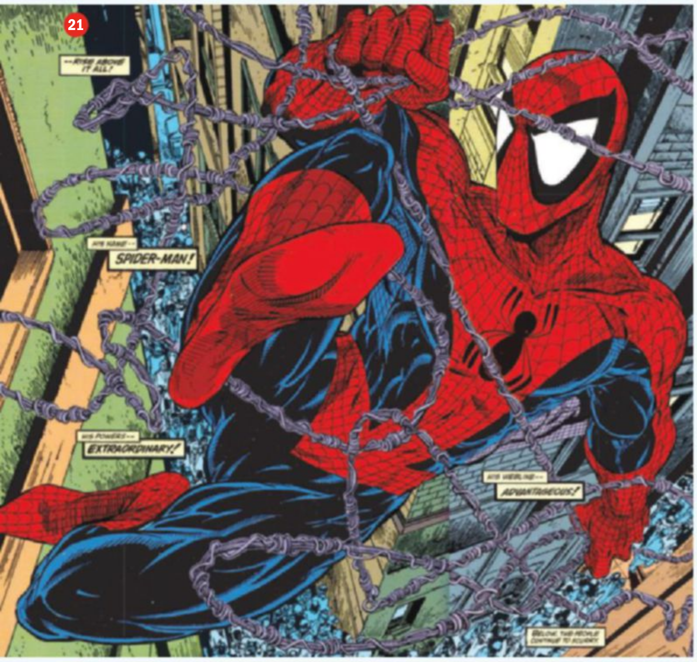
18. Cannon Films options the rights to make a Spider-Man movie for $225,000, beginning a 17-year struggle to bring Peter Parker to the big screen. ***Web of Spider-Man*,** a third simultaneous monthly solo comics series, begins its decade-long run.

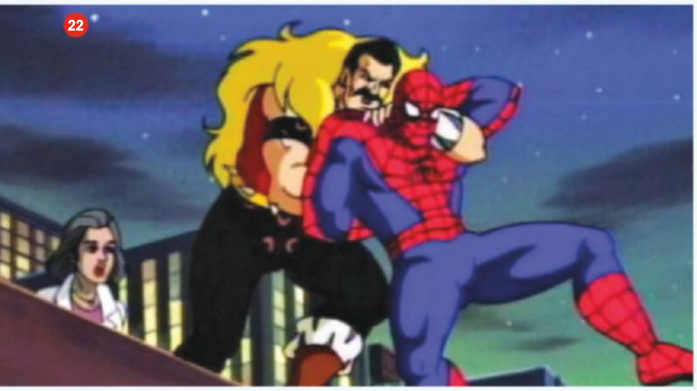
1987

19. Following a 21-year courtship, **Peter Parker marries Mary Jane Watson.** There are simultaneous ceremonies in *Amazing Spider-Man Annual* #21, the *Amazing Spider-Man* newspaper strip and a live event at Shea Stadium. Immediately upon returning from his honeymoon, Spidey is "killed" and replaced by Kraven the Hunter in the classic "Kraven's Last Hunt" story line.

1988

20. Artist **Todd McFarlane** joins *Amazing Spider-Man* with issue #298 and draws the first appearance of Venom in the following issue.


21
--RISE ABOVE IT ALL?
HIS NAME--
SPIDER-MAN!
HIS POWERS--
EXTRAORDINARY!
ADVANTAGEOUS!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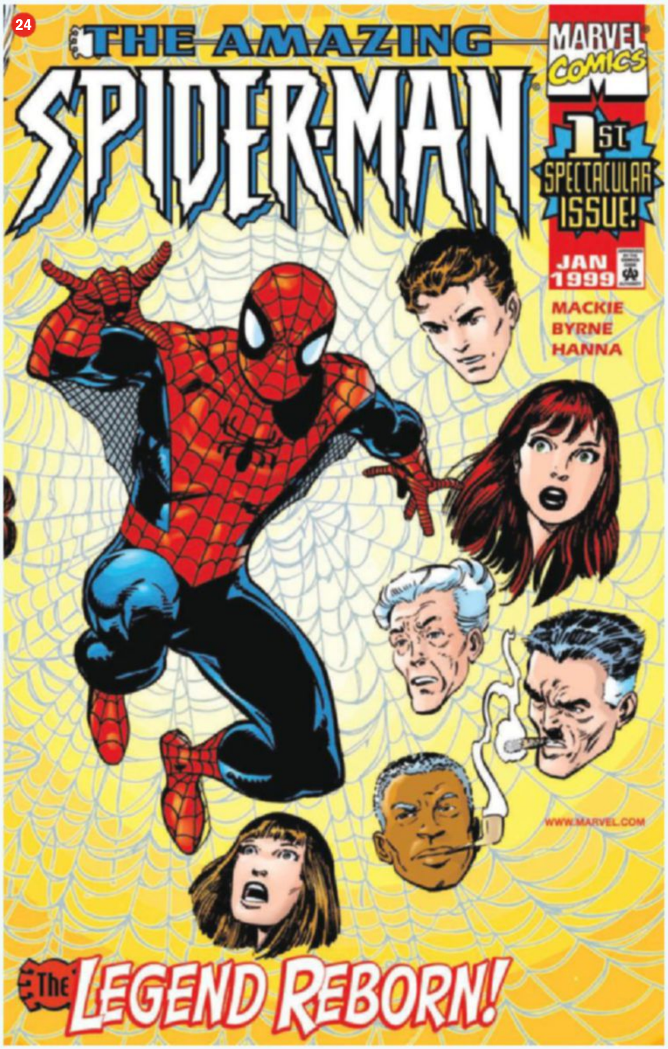

24
THE AMAZING
SPIDER-MAN
MARVEL COMICS
1ST SPECTACULAR ISSUE!
JAN 1999
MACKIE
BYRNE
HANNA
WWW.MARVEL.COM
The LEGEND REBORN!

1990

21. A fourth simultaneous monthly series begins, simply called ***Spider-Man*** and initially written and drawn by McFarlane. Its first issue sells more than 2.5 million copies.

1994

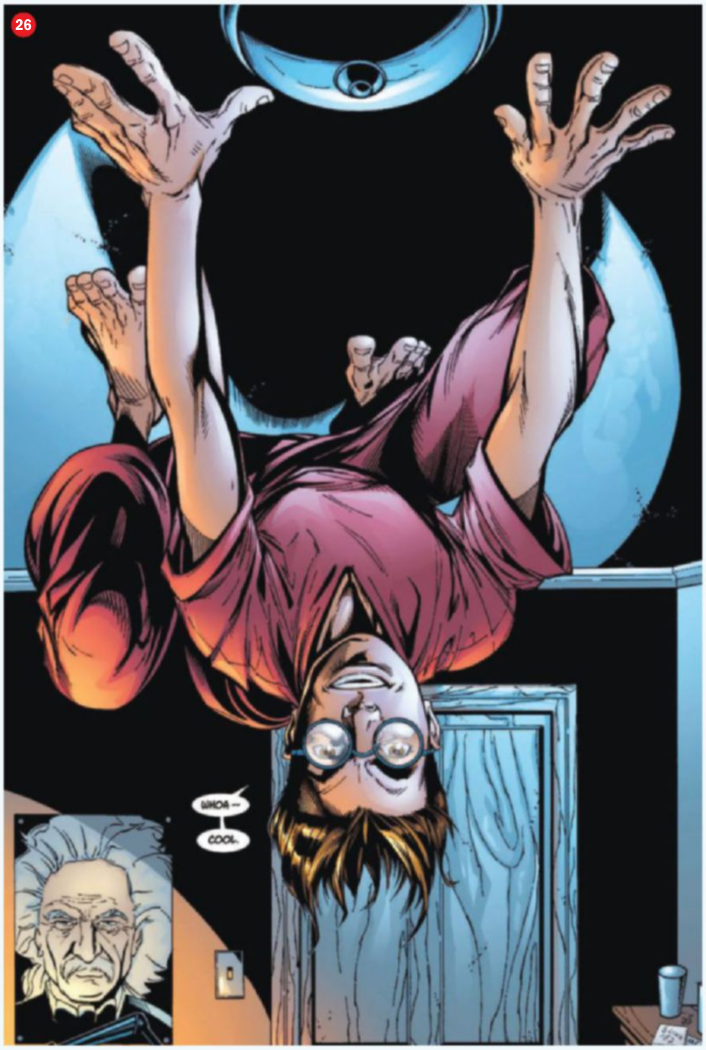
22. It turns out that Peter's clone from 1975 survived, is now calling himself Ben Reilly and may or may not be the original version of Peter. The Spider-Man comics' "Clone Saga" drags on for more than two years. Meanwhile, ***Spider-Man: The Animated Series*** begins its five-year TV run.

1995

23. Aunt May tragically dies in ***Amazing Spider-Man* #400** after revealing to Peter that she's known his secret for a long time and that he has her blessing. For two months the Spider-Man comics are replaced by Scarlet Spider comics, starring Ben Reilly.

1998

24. Aunt May is discovered to be alive after all in ***Spider-Man* #97.** The explanation is that the "Aunt May" who knew Peter's secret and died was an actress Norman Osborn had hired to impersonate her, but let's all talk about something else now! Right after #97, all the Spider-Man comics are relaunched with **new #1 issues** (but, as always, don't reboot the story).



1999

25. The Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man ride opens at Universal's theme park Islands of Adventure, reportedly costing $75 million to build. Five years later another version of it opens at Universal's theme park in Japan. **Sony Pictures,** meanwhile, pays a bit more than $10 million for the rights to make Spider-Man movies and live-action TV shows.

2000

26. Teenage Peter Parker is bitten by the radioactive spider in ***Ultimate Spider-Man* #1**—the first of Marvel's long-running Ultimate line of comics, set in an alternate universe. Brian Michael Bendis and Mark Bagley will write and draw, respectively, all of *Ultimate Spider-Man*'s first 111 issues, still a record for Marvel superhero comics.

2002

27. Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man*, starring Tobey Maguire, finally brings Spidey to American theater screens. The blockbuster goes on to spawn a beloved sequel, 2004's ***Spider-Man 2*.**

2007

28. *Spider-Man 3* debuts in theaters. Meanwhile, in comics, the infamous "One More Day" sequence involves Peter making a deal with the demi-satanic character Mephisto: the world will forget that he's Spider-Man, and in exchange his marriage to Mary Jane will retroactively never have happened.

28

31

SPIDER-MAN
TURN OFF THE DARK
FOXWOODS THEATRE
SPIDER-MAN TURN OFF THE DARK

2008

29. An anonymous donor gives the Library of Congress **Steve Ditko's original artwork** from the first Spider-Man story. The fondly remembered animated TV series *Spectacular Spider-Man* begins its first of two seasons. The *Amazing Spider-Man* comics, now published three times a month, introduce a new villain called Mister Negative (later seen in the video game ***Marvel Spider-Man***) and a new superheroine, Jackpot, who initially appears to be Mary Jane in disguise.

2009

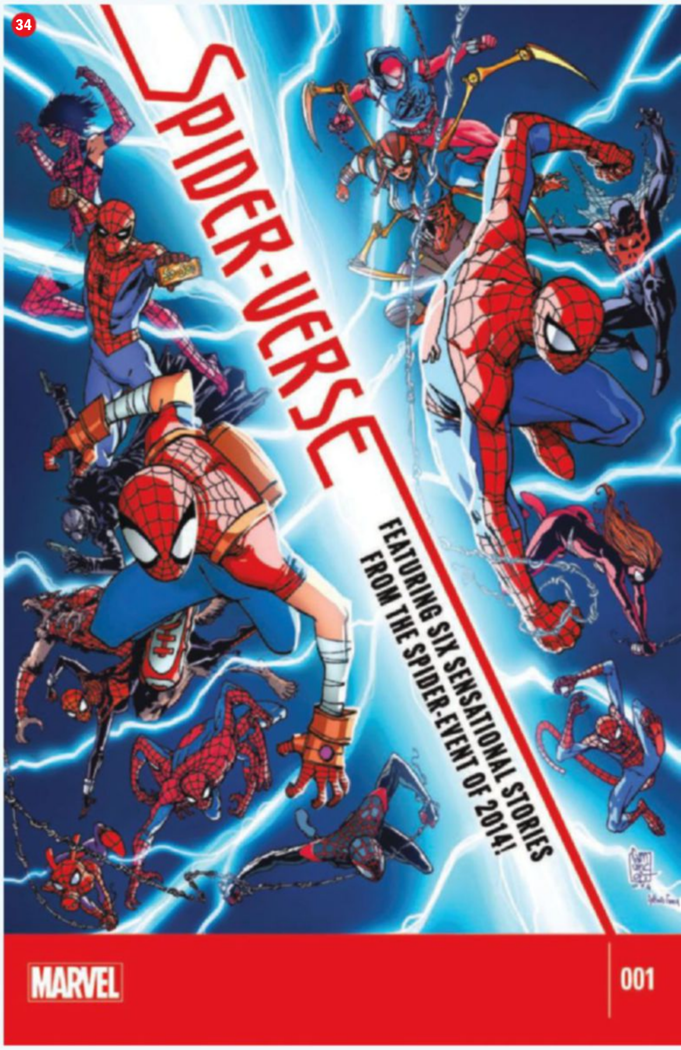
30. Aunt May marries J. Jonah Jameson's father in ***Amazing Spider-Man #600,*** which makes Peter and JJJ "brothers." *Spider-Man Noir,* an alternate-universe Peter Parker whose adventures are set in the 1930s, debuts; he later turns up in the 2018 film *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*.

2010

31. Previews begin on Broadway for ***Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark,*** a stage musical with songs by U2's Bono and the Edge that had been in development since 2002. It finally opens seven months later, to savage reviews.

2011

32. Following the death of the Ultimate Universe's Peter Parker, **Miles Morales** makes his first appearance in *Ultimate Fallout* #4. A Black and Latino kid with his own set of spider-powers, Miles decides to take up the Spider-Man identity as a tribute to Peter.


34
SPIDER-VERSE
FEATURING SIX SENSATIONAL STORIES FROM THE SPIDER-EVENT OF 2014!
MARVEL
001

2012

33. Marc Webb's ***The Amazing Spider-Man,*** starring Andrew Garfield as Peter, reboots Spider-Man on film. Disney XD's animated series *Ultimate Spider-Man* begins its four-season run. The *Amazing Spider-Man* comic book's 700th issue purports to be its last: Doctor Octopus kills Peter Parker and takes over his body, and the series is replaced by *The Superior Spider-Man,* with Doc Ock operating as Spidey, for more than a year.

2014

34. Webb's *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* is released. Peter Parker returns to his body for a new *Amazing Spider-Man* comics series, again relaunched with a new #1. The **"Spider-Verse"** comics event teams up and references "every Spider-Man ever," including Spider-Girl (Peter and MJ's daughter from an alternate universe); Spider-Ham; "the guy from *Seabiscuit*"; "the guy from *The Social Network*"; the Spidey seen in vintage Hostess cupcakes ads and more.

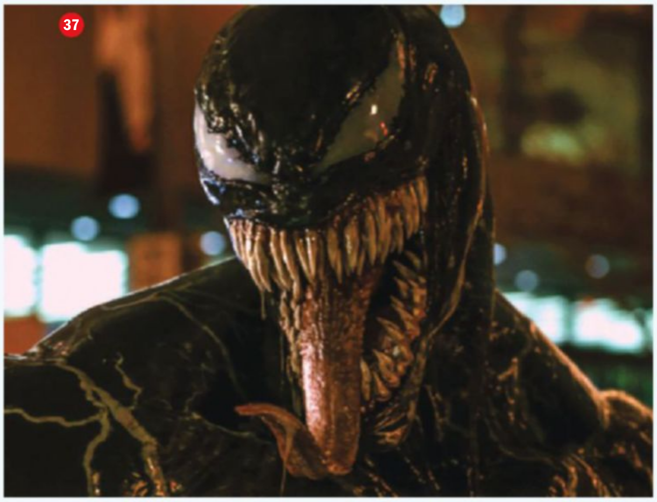
2016

35. The Marvel Cinematic Universe introduces its new Peter Parker, played by **Tom Holland,** in *Captain America: Civil War*. "The Clone Conspiracy" briefly resurrects nearly every character from Spider-Man comics who's ever died, as clones. (A few stick around.) Miles Morales gets a new comics series, simply called *Spider-Man*.

2017

36. Jon Watts's ***Spider-Man: Homecoming,*** starring Holland, lands in theaters, ushering in a new era for the hero. A massive hit, the film spawns the 2019 sequel *Spider-Man: Far From Home*.

37



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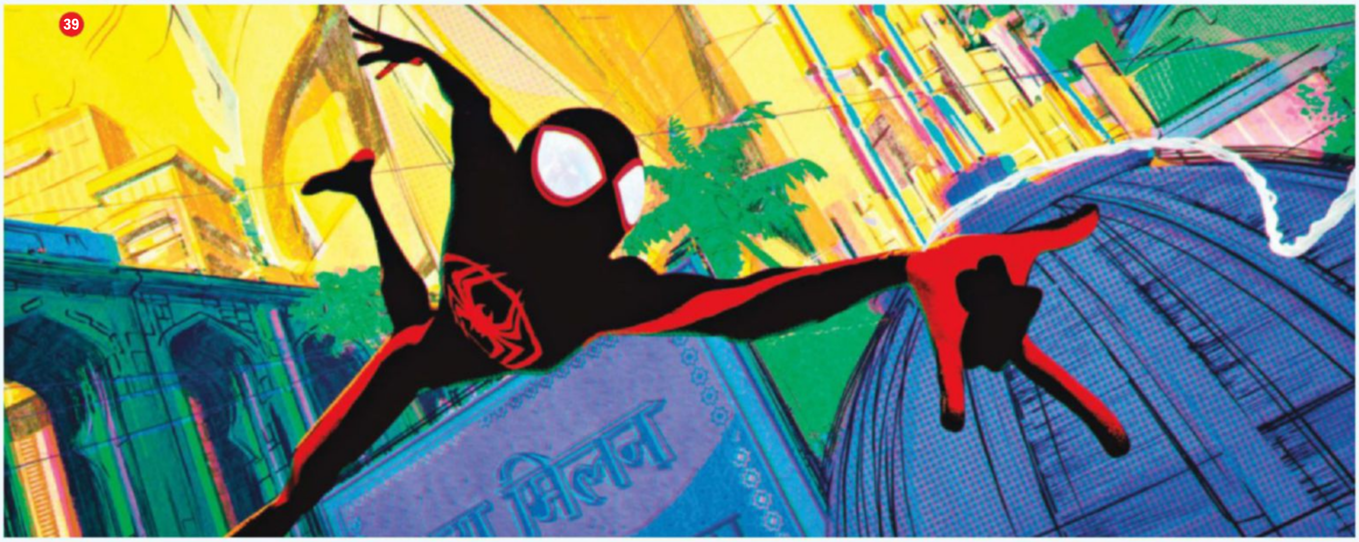

TO BE CONTINUED!

2018

37. Sony releases two Spider-Man-related movies: the live-action ***Venom*** and the animated ***Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse,*** the first film to feature Miles Morales. Dan Slott concludes his decade-long tenure on *Amazing Spider-Man*, having written well over 150 issues; subsequently, Marvel Comics publishes its fifth issue to be called *Amazing Spider-Man* #1. The PlayStation game *Marvel's Spider-Man* sells 3.3 million copies in its first three days.

2021

38. A copy of Spidey's first appearance in *Amazing Fantasy* #15 sells at auction for $3.6 million, the highest price at the time ever paid for a comic book. ***Spider-Man: No Way Home*** borrows plot points from 2007's "One More Day," with a twist courtesy of Doctor Strange, and brings the multiverse concept to the MCU. *Venom: Let There Be Carnage* debuts in theaters.

2023

39. ***Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse*** returns Miles Morales to the multiplex in a colorful adventure that collects nearly $700 million at the worldwide box office and earns an Oscar nomination for Best Animated Feature. On the video game front, *Marvel's Spider-Man 2*, featuring both Peter Parker and Miles, arrives for the PlayStation 5; it goes on to sell more than 2.5 million copies.

2026

40. ***Spider-Man: Brand New Day*** opens July 31 with Holland back in the lead and MCU favorites, including Mark Ruffalo as Bruce Banner and Jon Bernthal as the Punisher, among the cast. The eight-episode TV series *Spider-Noir*, starring Nicolas Cage as 1930s detective Ben Reilly, premieres May 25.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BIG SCREEN

SWINGING INTO CINEMAS, PETER PARKER BECAME HOLLYWOOD'S GO-TO LEADING MAN

Tobey Maguire as Peter Parker in 2002's *Spider-Man*.

GOING HOLLYWOOD

With Sam Raimi's 2002 box office smash *Spider-Man*, Tobey Maguire brought web-slinger Peter Parker to the big screen, helping to launch a new era of superheroes on film.

BY REBECCA ASCHER-WALSH

BY THE TIME TOBEY MAGUIRE STEPPED in front of the cameras suited up as Spider-Man in 2001, the mere fact that cameras were rolling seemed like a superhero trick. The property had been involved in legal dustups and lawsuits for close to a decade, as major studios battled for the rights to the Marvel property before they ultimately landed at Sony. Now, not only was the studio betting a reported $100 million that the film would be a blockbuster, but it was gambling on an unproven action star to carry the show.

For the comic book's first big-screen iteration, screenwriter David Koepp (*Jurassic Park*) and director Sam Raimi—who had made 1990's *Darkman*—envisioned a faithful adaptation of Spider-Man's origin story: the orphaned, nerdy teenager Peter Parker is bitten by a mutant spider, discovering what it takes to tackle the Green Goblin midair. But back on earth, Spider-Man would also be a coming-of-age tale about an unmoored misfit mourning a family tragedy and pining after the girl next door, Mary Jane Watson. In other words, character development—and the characters' flaws—would share center stage with groundbreaking F/X. Explained Raimi, "The human story has always been the strength of the comic."

The studio considered A-listers including Ewan McGregor and Leonardo DiCaprio, but it was Maguire's tender turn in 1999's *The Cider House Rules* that earned him the starring role after a screen test proved his fighting mettle. "We needed someone who . . . lived with a certain doubt and angst," Raimi explained. "The studio was thinking of somebody who had a sexier appearance . . . but once they saw the screen test, they understood." Maguire expressed no concerns. "He's someone who agonizes a lot about his role in life," he said of Parker. "I knew that I could pull [it] off without disappointing people."

To play Mary Jane Watson, the filmmakers talked about Kate Hudson and Alicia Witt before hiring Kirsten Dunst only days before filming began. Raimi warned her during her screen test that she would have lots of stunts, to which she remembered responding, "'Yeah, I'm up for everything. . . . You can hang me here, hang me there.'" But, she admitted, "there was a lot more hanging than I thought there'd be." Filling out the cast were Willem Dafoe playing the Green Goblin, Cliff Robertson as Uncle Ben, Rosemary Harris as Aunt May, James Franco as Harry Osborn and J.K. Simmons as J. Jonah Jameson.

> "HE'S SOMEONE WHO AGONIZES A LOT ABOUT HIS ROLE IN LIFE."
>
> **—TOBEY MAGUIRE, ON PETER PARKER**

The casting and the artful mix of superhuman dazzle and oh-so-human woe were kismet. Released in 2002, *Spider-Man* became at the time the fifth-largest-grossing film in history, earning more than $800 million at the box office. The filmmakers, banking on success, had locked Maguire and Dunst into a sequel, and later that year the key players reassembled for *Spider-Man 2*, along with Alfred Molina (*Frida*) as the villainous half-man, half-octopus Doc Ock.

The script, co-written by Pulitzer Prize winner Michael Chabon (who later became showrunner of *Star Trek: Picard*) along with Alfred Gough and Miles Millar, continued to explore the conflict between Spider-Man's calling to save the world and Parker's emotional well-being (or lack thereof). "Peter is constantly suffering and conflicted," said Maguire, who expressed his own conflict when he asked for filming to be delayed, citing a back injury; when the studio offered to replace him with Jake Gyllenhaal, Maguire stepped back up to receive his $17 million payday, a $13 million raise from the first film. The studio's $200 million investment was again handsomely repaid when the film opened in 2004, earning close to $800 million worldwide.

The team united again in 2006 for *Spider-Man 3*, with Raimi directing from a script he had co-written. Parker finally begins to move toward a semblance of peace and contends with three villains: Flint Marko/Sandman (Thomas Haden Church), Eddie Brock/

Clockwise from top left: Tobey Maguire as Spider-Man with director Sam Raimi and co-star Kirsten Dunst; Maguire's Spidey sees his reflection wearing the symbiote suit; Alfred Molina as Doc Ock.

Venom (Topher Grace) and Harry Osborn, now the New Goblin (Franco). Joining the cast were Bryce Dallas Howard as Gwen Stacy, Peter's lab partner, and James Cromwell as Gwen's father, Captain George Stacy.

With a reported budget of more than $300 million, it was the most expensive film made at the time. When it was released in 2007, some critics were unimpressed—Manohla Dargis of *The New York Times* called it "fizzled rather than fizzy"—but audiences had no such misgivings, and the film went on to earn almost $900 million worldwide.

The trilogy's success had sent Hollywood into a flurry to get in on the superhero action and propelled Marvel Studios to launch its own billion-dollar franchise, christened with 2008's *Iron Man*. But *Spider-Man 3* marked the end for this creative team. In January 2010 Raimi withdrew from a fourth film, saying he couldn't make its intended summer 2011 release date and keep the film's "integrity." The cast—including Maguire—shortly followed suit. Maguire released a statement reading, "I am so proud of what we accomplished with the Spider-Man franchise over the last decade . . . [and] I am excited to see the next chapter unfold in this incredible story." ●

FILM REVIEW

Spidey Swings

TIME's critic evaluated Sam Raimi's original adventure.

BY RICHARD CORLISS

HOLLYWOOD LOVES COMIC books, from the *Blondie* and *Dick Tracy* B movies of the '30s and '40s to the more recent big-budget franchises of Superman and Batman. There are times (say, every holiday season) when American movies seem to be one gigantic, endless comic book. The film industry has long been buggy about creepy crawlers too. In the '50s it spawned the mammoth postnuclear monsters of *Them* (ants) and *Tarantula*, and 30 years later it bankrolled David Cronenberg's magnificent remake of *The Fly*.

So the crossbreeding of Spider-Man with new film technology—part of Marvel Comics' adventure in big-budget movies, which began with the hit *Blade* and *X-Men* entries—seems a natural. On the printed page, a comic book action hero is an oxymoron; a man can fly only in the reader's complicitous mind. Films make the fantastic real; they

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JUNE 3, 2002

Clockwise from left: Spider-Man leaps into action; Spidey and MJ; Willem Dafoe as Norman Osborn.

are, after all, called motion pictures. In the new *Spider-Man*, our friendly neighborhood arachno-human can execute some cool moves as he trapezes above New York City. In these aerial scenes (a combination of acrobatic stunt work and digital derring-do), Spidey zooms and glides and quadruple-somersaults like a one-man Cirque du Soleil troupe, and the movie and the audience soar with him (for a while, anyway) on a great vertiginous ride.

The film, directed by Sam Raimi and written by David Koepp, is a faithful adaptation of the Stan Lee original—faithful to a fault. Spidey, aka Peter Parker (Tobey Maguire), is still the teen dweeb from Queens with a crush on the girl next door (Kirsten Dunst), a dose of genetically altered spider DNA in his veins and a compulsion to save the world from the gaudy Green Goblin (Willem Dafoe). Sure, he can leap tall buildings with several sticky bounds, but he's also nearly grounded by a load of unresolved guilt. Plenty of classic heroes—Oedipus, Hamlet, Luke Skywalker—are obliged to kill a father figure; by the time this movie is over, Peter is responsible for the deaths of two such figures. That makes him one conflicted kid.

And it makes this *Spider-Man* a nest of conflicting ambitions. Every Hollywood marketing impulse screams for the movie to be zippily cartoonish. Yet the story is also *Rebel Without a Cause*: an agitated boy, the girl he loves, his best friend (James Franco as the Goblin's son) and some adults who never quite get it. Will *Spider-Man* be *Ghostbusters* or *Ghost World*?

Raimi, whose 1990 *Darkman* gracefully blended fantasy and pathos, pretty much goes with Plan B. The cast of serious actors, who might feel more at home in a rep theater than a franchise starter, is led by Maguire. The young star, a quiet, thoughtful presence in *Wonder Boys* and *The Cider House Rules*, can seem like an alien sent to observe earthlings. Here he's highly muscled but still sensitive; he certainly cries way more than your standard superhero. Raimi directs the film at Maguire's pensive pace. Some scenes are just inert. Whole swatches of *Spider-Man* play like a $139 million indie film.

In emphasizing angst over energy, the movie is much like its hero—not the dashing crime fighter in a red-and-black bodysuit but the introspective nerd who both endears and exasperates. Perhaps that's artistically appropriate, for *Spider-Man* is about the awkward process of becoming, of somehow surviving teen turmoil to turn into, as Peter's saintly Uncle Ben (Cliff Robertson) tells him, "the man you're going to be for the rest of your life." Why shouldn't there be growing pains in the Spider-Man movie? Just as Peter's transformation is a process of trial and error, so the series may be able to mature in the planned sequels. The James Bond, Star Wars and Batman series show that first episodes are often outshone by later installments.

"With great power," Uncle Ben also says, "comes great responsibility." And with great hype come great expectations. This movie, which is already a big hit, is up against more than a beloved comic book; for the millions of visitors to Universal Studios Florida, it must overcome memories of the Spider-Man theme park attraction. In a six-minute tram tour of upper Manhattan, the ride provides careering thrills, state-of-the-art 3-D visuals and a fistful of supervillains. There, and not on Sam Raimi's screen, is where to find a charismatic Spider-Man—and a moving marvel.

FILM REVIEW

Spinning Gold

Full of character, comedy, spectacle and heart, the wildly entertaining *Spider-Man 2* became an instant classic.

BY RICHARD SCHICKEL

WHAT A DORK! PETER Parker (Tobey Maguire) is behind in his rent, behind in his classwork, doing too many part-time jobs badly—and that says nothing about his intimacy problem. It's dangerous for his beloved Mary Jane Watson (Kirsten Dunst) to know he's Spider-Man, so he has to keep his true, agonized self distant from her yearning heart. Every once in a while, this affects his superheroic night job: he loses the ability to spin the sticky webs that permit him boinging passage

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED JULY 5, 2004

Clockwise from left: Spidey vs. Doc Ock; Harry Osborn threatens Spider-Man; Kirsten Dunst as MJ.

through the New York City skies, and—*splat! ouch!*—he tumbles to the concrete.

Is this any way to manage a franchise film? You bet it is. Written primarily by Alvin Sargent (who the credits indicate had a lot of help) and directed by Sam Raimi with his heart on his sleeve and his tongue in his cheek, *Spider-Man 2* is (1) a sequel that's much better than the original movie and (2) probably the best special-effects extravaganza since *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. This is because the effects, though handsomely managed, don't overwhelm the story and characters.

The latter include a soulful scientist (Alfred Molina) who, having fooled with Mother Nature, is somehow transformed into a great, clanking mechanical octopus; Peter's spunky, sweet-spirited aunt (the divine Rosemary Harris, back from Spidey 1); and the meanest newspaper managing editor in movie history (J.K. Simmons). Occasionally, a street singer shows up to croak awful ballads about Spidey's exploits, and poor Auntie can't even get a toaster premium, much less a desperately needed loan, from her bank.

That's the thing about this movie. It takes the time—all right, sometimes too much time—to meander up paths that are not strictly germane to its main narrative. But mostly that pays off—in funny tossed-off lines and quirky situations and a nice warm glow at the end. We're not dealing with Jamesian complexity here. But we do have something almost as rare to contemplate: a big Hollywood machine that's unexpectedly full of wit and—dare we say it?—intelligence.

FILM REVIEW

Spider-Man Gets Sensitive

Sam Raimi's trilogy of superhero films concludes with an operatic flourish full of action, emotion and a trio of villains.

BY RICHARD CORLISS

THESE DAYS DIRECTORS of special-effects epics can spend money faster than Tony Soprano at the roulette table. Tony, in moments of crisis, has an anxiety attack or orders someone's death. In *Spider-Man 3*, Peter Parker (Tobey Maguire), the young-adult nerd with preternatural powers, gets covered in intergalactic black stickum. Once he's gooed, he's bad—bad for him, anyway, which is still better than most of us on our best behavior. He spends much of the movie trying to resist the temptation of outlawry, the nefarious fashion of basic black.

This plot device has tested the credulity of some early viewers, but plausibility isn't the biggest challenge for the comic book movie fan base. Sentimentality is. And no question, this is one wet action movie. It sets a world's record for so-called tough guys shedding tears. Harry Osborn (James Franco) gets weepie over his father's death and enraged at his belief that Peter was responsible for it; he vents his rage in the supervillain guise of the New Goblin. Before being transformed into the irradiated Sandman, Flint Marko (Thomas Haden Church), the recidivist hoodlum—and murderer of Peter's sainted uncle—goes all soft and moist as he clutches his young daughter's locket.

Peter has a jewelry fetish too: his aunt has given him her wedding ring, which he plans to present to his girlfriend, Mary Jane (Kirsten Dunst). But our hero has more urgent concerns. His protracted adolescent funk has given way to an anxiety crisis, from which his ability to soar over the city saving lives cannot extricate him.

Spidey 3 is essentially a romantic drama punctuated by VFX chases. It's about bonding, breaking the bonds and retying them, tighter than ever. The major characters all are in need of sensitivity training, and they all get it, often just before they die. They beg for forgiveness, understanding and love. The emotions are so exalted, the movie is like opera without the arias. And virtually all of these sob sisters are guys. It's got more noble man-love than any movie since . . . well, since *300*, except that these action figures don't have the Spartans' gigantic, tumorous abs.

Which could be why I liked it. To place a sensitive story in a male-epic genre—to dramatize feelings of angst and personal betrayal worthy of an Ingmar Bergman film, and then to dress them up in gaudy comic book colors—is to pull off a smartly subversive drag show. With, yes, 25 minutes of fabulous fights. Peter's tussle with Sandman and his aerial battle with the supersonic skateboarding New Goblin are plenty snazzy. But anyone can do that; in action movies, everyone has done that. What's better, in a threequel, is rethinking the characters, the franchise and the genre.

In Spidey 3, Peter is starting to fall in love with his reputation. It's not enough that he saves people; he must be seen saving them. "They love me!" he cries with a dawning pleasure. Celebrity is this superhero's cocaine. The headlines are the high—that, and the attentions of ultra-blond trophy girl Gwen (Bryce Dallas Howard). "Who are you?" Mary Jane demands, and Peter honestly replies, "I don't know." What he does know is that he feels a rush in the black suit he never got in the red one.

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Clockwise from left: MJ and Peter Parker; Thomas Haden Church as Flint Marko; Venom has Spidey in his grip.

Problem is, Peter is still enough of a nice kid that he can't quite pull off the attendant arrogance.

When he combs his hair forward, he's still a dweeb, not a dude. When he tells a villain, "I guess you haven't heard I'm the sheriff 'round these parts," he's still geeky-gawky, closer to John Mayer than John Wayne. Bopping down the street to a hip-hop rhythm, he's laughably gauche—a white kid playing at soul man, a good kid who's not very good at being *baaad*.

There's one villain who enjoys the job: Eddie Brock (Topher Grace), aka Venom. "I like being bad," he exults. "It makes me happy." The third of Peter's rivals, Eddie-Venom is the reckless spirit of what teens would do if they dared, if there were no consequences, no censorious adult monitoring them. His tone of impish hell-raising seems out of place amid all the characters—Peter-Spider, Flint-Sandman and Harry-Goblin—seeking to purge their inner demons, receive absolution for their sins. In this very serious movie, only Grace and Raimi regular Bruce Campbell, in a nice cameo as a *varry* Franch maitre d', seem to be having the outsize fun normally associated with comic book capers.

Raimi made his cult rep with the two *Evil Dead* horror films and the comics-inspired *Darkman*. But he's gone sensitive before, as in the Kevin Costner baseball drama *For Love of the Game*. In the last two Spidey films he's teamed with screenwriter Alvin Sargent, who, in a 40-year career, has scripted such weepies as *Julia*, *Ordinary People*, *Anywhere But Here* and *Unfaithful*. The rules for *Spider-Man 3* are closer to the ones for those wayward domestic romances than to action-movie guidelines. Except for one thing: the love and friendship drama is about the men.

Tobey Maguire was best known for his roles in art house films such as *Pleasantville* (below right) when he was cast as Spider-Man.

Rooting for the Underdog

Playing one of the world's most beloved superheroes catapulted Tobey Maguire from character actor to A-list leading man.

BY JESS CAGLE

TOBEY MAGUIRE, AS MANY have noted, is an unlikely action hero. Then again, so is Spider-Man. Maguire's own background as a lonely California kid may have been better preparation for his breakout role as the angst-ridden Spidey than hours in the gym. Before the film *Spider-Man* made him internationally famous, Maguire was known as one of Hollywood's go-to actors for troubled-youth parts: a neglected loner in *The Ice Storm* (1997), a teen yearning for escape in *Pleasantville* (1998), an orphan searching for a home in *The Cider House Rules* (1999), a self-destructive college student in *Wonder Boys* (2000). His performances were enigmatic, unpredictable and haunting—hardly swaggering leading-man turns wherein he saves the day and gets the girl.

There were other, more natural choices for the red cowl. *A Knight's Tale's* Heath Ledger and *American Beauty's* Wes Bentley—both of whom seem to be born for billboards—were among the possibilities. But director Sam Raimi knew from the beginning (or at least as soon as his wife showed him a videotape of *Cider House Rules*) that the 5 foot 8 inch Maguire, 26, was his man. "We needed someone who could play 17 years old," says the director, "and if you think about the available actors, that knocks out about 90 percent of them." But the studio wasn't sold. "We made Tobey do a test, because he's not the first person you think of," concedes Columbia chairman Amy Pascal. "He did a test, he took off his shirt, and then we all said OK."

That now seems like a smart call. The cheers from movie critics who singled out Maguire's reserved, brooding performance might have played a role in enticing moviegoers beyond the film's core audience of young males. The very qualities that until now have kept Maguire from becoming a bigger star are integral to his portrayal of the unassuming student Peter Parker. "Tobey's an Everyman," says producer Laura Ziskin. "He's adorable, but he's not the classic hunk. He's not a model. He looks like an ordinary kid." Somehow, Maguire's quiet ordinariness gives a glimpse of his character's roiling inner life. "He doesn't really act," says Raimi. "He just is. I think he has the confidence that the audience will perceive his feelings and thoughts, and he's right."

Though Maguire says he never read the comic book until he got the part, he saw in the character "a really good-hearted, typical underdog who I could certainly relate to." Like Peter Parker, Maguire comes from a broken home. After his parents' divorce, when he was 2, he spent his childhood being shuttled up and down the West Coast, from parent to parent, school to school. His mother encouraged her angry, rebellious son to study acting, and he soon began appearing in one-line parts on sitcoms. After ninth grade, he dropped out of school to become an actor and made his feature debut alongside his pal Leonardo DiCaprio in 1993's *This Boy's Life*.

Now Maguire is being compared to DiCaprio–another serious actor turned teen idol following a big mainstream hit. But he hasn't let success go to his head. "I just want to make good movies," says Maguire. "If there's a script I like with a character I like and a filmmaker I like, I would do the movie. I'm not really concerned about money."

SWING SHIFT

A refreshing burst of indie spirit powered the set of blockbusters starring lifelong Spider-Man fan Andrew Garfield.

BY AMY WILKINSON

AFTER THREE SUCCESSFUL SPIDER-Man films, director Sam Raimi was burned out. He'd signed on to helm *Spider-Man 4*, set for release in 2011, but the script—reportedly starting its fourth rewrite—just wasn't working. Realizing he couldn't maintain his creative integrity and get the movie done on time, Raimi withdrew from the project. Columbia Pictures pulled the plug on its planned sequels, and that was that. The studio decided a reboot was the only way forward.

And so the search for a director to reimagine the studio's most valuable property began. Around that time Matt Tolmach, Columbia president turned Spider-Man producer, took a meeting with *(500) Days of Summer* director Marc Webb, whose 2009 indie romance had charmed audiences. Although Spider-Man was not on their agenda, talk eventually turned to the flailing franchise, and Webb revealed himself to be something of a comics nerd. He suggested a grittier take on the hero, one that leaned into Peter's grief and uncertainty over his parents' deaths. The job was soon his.

With the aptly named Webb on board, casting for a new Peter Parker kicked into high gear. Nearly every

Andrew Garfield as Peter Parker.

Clockwise from left: Andrew Garfield performed an aerial maneuver on set; Emma Stone and Garfield as Gwen Stacy and Peter; Spider-Man battles Electro's charges; Rhys Ifans as Curt Connors.

actor under the age of 30 read for the part, with names like Josh Hutcherson, Anton Yelchin, Logan Lerman and Jamie Bell in the mix. But it would be 26-year-old Andrew Garfield, fresh off his turn in David Fincher's 2010 film *The Social Network*, who would don the spandex suit. It wouldn't be his first spin as Spider-Man. During the casting process, Garfield sent Webb a photo of himself at 3 years old, dressed as Spidey, to express his passion for the project.

"That photo killed me," Webb told *Entertainment Weekly* in 2012. "And with it Andrew wrote a very moving email about why Spider-Man had such an impact on him. He'd felt bullied as a kid, and Spider-Man allowed him to work out those issues in his imagination. You almost get the sense that playing this part was his destiny." Garfield agreed. "I honestly still can't wrap my head around the fact that I'm playing this character that's meant so much to me over the years," he told *EW* in 2012.

With a screenplay by James Vanderbilt, Alvin Sargent and Steve Kloves, *The Amazing Spider-Man* hit many of the same beats as Raimi's original—the deaths of Peter's parents and beloved Uncle Ben (Martin Sheen); his close relationship with Aunt May (Sally Field); the infamous nibble from a radioactive spider—with a few exceptions. For one, the villain this time was Dr. Curt Connors's reptilian alter ego, the Lizard (Rhys Ifans). Second, Peter's love interest was not Mary Jane Watson but rather smarty-pants Gwen Stacy, his first love in the comic book series, played by 23-year-old *Easy A* star Emma Stone. (She and Garfield would become an off-screen item, too.)

When the film hit theaters on July 3, 2012, some criticized the repetitive nature of the origin story but praised Garfield's and Stone's performances and off-the-charts chemistry. *EW* critic Lisa Schwarzbaum called Webb's retelling "a friskier, sweeter-natured variation on the story Sam Raimi told in his recent trilogy, with greater emphasis on human relations than on special effects."

“YOU ALMOST GET THE SENSE THAT PLAYING THIS PART WAS HIS DESTINY.”

—MARC WEBB, ON ANDREW GARFIELD’S SPIDER-MAN

Thanks to a $758 million worldwide box office tally, a sequel was soon in the offing. Production began on *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* in early 2013, with the cast and crew exuding a level of confidence they hadn’t had on the first film. “You can feel it on the set,” Webb told *EW* in 2013. “People aren’t scared.” Webb felt newly liberated with Peter’s origin story out of the way. “That was kind of brutal because people were so familiar with it,” he said.

Writers Alex Kurtzman, Roberto Orci, Jeff Pinkner and James Vanderbilt introduced a new rogues’ gallery: Jamie Foxx as Max Dillon/Electro; Dane DeHaan as Harry Osborn/the Green Goblin; and Paul Giamatti as Aleksei Sytsevich/the Rhino. Their ambition, coupled with the decision to end on a despairing note with (spoiler alert!) Gwen’s death, might have gotten the better of them. “The busy finale—or rather, finales—keeps coming until you want to blow a whistle and call it a draw,” wrote *EW*’s Chris Nashawaty. Audiences were less keen, and the film earned less than its predecessor but still brought in a respectable $709 million.

In the sequel’s lead-up, the studio had announced big plans for the Amazing Spider-Man franchise, including third and fourth installments, plus spin-offs featuring Venom and a bad-guy team-up devoted to the villains collectively known in Spidey lore as the Sinister Six. But the comic book movie gods had other ideas in mind.

Once Sony Pictures (Columbia’s parent company) and Disney (Marvel’s parent company) agreed to a deal in which the web-slinger would become part of the Marvel Cinematic Universe, starting with 2016’s *Captain America: Civil War*, Garfield’s run as Spidey was over. There was a new Brit-in-waiting who would pick up Peter’s web shooters and save the day. ●

Additional reporting by Chris Nashawaty and Sara Vilkomerson

FILM REVIEW

An Amazing Reboot

Thanks to Andrew Garfield's Spider-Man, everything not-so-old feels new again in director Marc Webb's take on the Marvel comics hero.

BY MARY POLS

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PERHAPS YOU THOUGHT THE world did not need another Spider-Man, since Sam Raimi, Tobey Maguire and Kirsten Dunst did such a nice job with him, circa 2002–07. Even if their third installment had less zing in its swing, it seemed unseemly for Columbia Pictures to reboot the franchise so soon, like those people who finish a remodel on their home and then start another a year later. Can't we just enjoy what we already have?

Marc Webb's ebullient, satisfying *The Amazing Spider-Man* might leave you with a new attitude about crime-fighting superheroes; it certainly did so for me. They're becoming like venerable Broadway plays, trotted out with different casts and directors on different occasions, proving themselves surprisingly flexible to new ideas, new stars. You don't say, "Oh, I've already seen *Death of a Salesman*." You say, "Philip Seymour Hoffman as Willy Loman? I'll bite." (Provided you had the chance while it lasted.)

It so happens that Andrew Garfield, the new Spider-Man, played Biff to Hoffman's Willy in Mike Nichols' *Death of a Salesman* and got great notices. He deserves more of the same for his Peter Parker. The character is young, a senior at Midtown Science High School, and stays the same age throughout—the bony, almost bulbous-nosed Garfield (*Never Let Me Go*, *The Social Network*) was 28 in real life when he shot the film, a bit old for high school, but between the lanky physique and puff of hair, he manages a credible teen. He does very well with Peter's goober tendencies and the tenderness Peter feels toward Aunt May (Sally Field) and Uncle Ben (Martin Sheen). This Spider-Man is full of moist sincerity; he's always tearing up. But Garfield has the edge on Maguire in terms of Peter's sex appeal, which grows apace—along with his sarcasm—with each street fight won and building scaled. That famous Dunst-Maguire kiss? *The Amazing Spider-Man* has one just as good, between Peter and his pre–Mary Jane love, high school classmate Gwen Stacy (Emma Stone of *The Help* and *Easy A*). Gwen is beautiful, brilliant (she interns at Oscorp) and the daughter of police captain George Stacy (Denis Leary).

A Marvel obsessive may take exception with the way the fleet of screenwriters, including *Harry Potter* stalwart Steve Kloves, have handled the story. *The Amazing Spider-Man* is neither a pure return to the source material nor a prequel to the Raimi narrative; it wavers somewhere in between. It helps to be forgetful (which comic book fans don't tend to be). I didn't rewatch the first Raimi film until after I'd seen Webb's—*(500) Days of Summer* is the only other film Webb has directed—and the sum of my memory of Raimi's had faded to *Fun! Good kiss! Cute Tobey! Good swinging!* But even so, when the new Uncle Ben goes down in the street and the light leaves Martin Sheen's eyes, all I could think was, How many more times are we going to see this man's blood run on the pavement?

The Amazing Spider-Man covers

Clockwise from top: Peter Parker is surprised by his powers; Spider-Man and Gwen Stacy; Uncle Ben and Aunt May.

Peter's bite and subsequent transformation in greater detail, playing off his bafflement about it to fine effect, as well as his dawning realization that being part spider is awesome. There's a nifty scene on a subway car, with Peter apologizing left and right as he discovers his new strength and the challenges of having organic Velcro on his fingertips. How would it be to go from geeky teen who can't get a date to someone who can move like Mikhail Baryshnikov at warp speed? Thrilling, and that's what it looks like. None of this is new to us, but Garfield and Webb make it feel convincingly fresh and exciting.

The main narrative difference, other than his youth and love interest, is that Peter is more focused on the absence of his parents, Richard (Campbell Scott) and Mary Parker (Embeth Davidtz), who leave him with Aunt May and Uncle Ben in a prologue and then die in a plane crash. As a teen, Peter finds some of his father's old files from Oscorp and pays a fateful visit to Dr. Curt Connors (Rhys Ifans), his father's former colleague and best friend, although it turns out, not a very loyal one. "He never even called," spits Uncle Ben. Sheen is just right as Uncle Ben, and Field is good too as Aunt May, although I found her youthful mane of dark, cascading curls distracting.

Like Norman Osborn, Dr. Connors dabbles in his own genetically engineered serums, which restore a missing arm (plus!) but turn him into a lizard (negative!). Ifans handles the furtive aspect of pre-lizard Dr. Connors nicely, but when he goes reptilian, the man and villain hardly seem connected, unlike Willem Dafoe's Green Goblin, who always seemed like an adjunct of Norman. Also, even in 3-D, I found the lizard version of Dr. Connors mechanical and fake, straight out of a B movie. I appreciated Captain Stacy's withering comment to Peter, mid–lizard denial: "Do I look like the mayor of Tokyo to you?"

Nearly as many sparks fly between Peter and the cop as do between Peter and Gwen. For their first date, Gwen invites her classmate to share a special dinner with the family. "We're having branzino," she promises. This trendy fish is often served whole on the plate. I think, from the teasing way Gwen repeatedly says "branzino" to Peter, that she finds both her mother's culinary reaching and Peter's cluelessness about the treat he's being offered amusing. They lob the word back and forth flirtatiously, which is weird and yet delightful.

Garfield and Stone have serious chemistry (they're dating in real life). Maybe it's partly Stone's husky, Bacall-like voice, but their dialogue has an old-fashioned feel to it—two smart kids sparring, with occasional pauses to kiss. They're intellectual equals (she's first in her class; he's second, according to Gwen), but she's still swayed by that physical-power business. I look forward to seeing more of them together, and I suspect audiences will too.

FILM REVIEW

A Web of Missed Opportunities

Despite Andrew Garfield's performance, the downbeat *Amazing Spider-Man 2* stays largely earthbound.

BY RICHARD CORLISS

PETER PARKER (ANDREW Garfield) has just returned home, sneaking through his bedroom window, after some grimy crime-fighting as Spider-Man. His dear Aunt May (Sally Field) bursts in and observes how dirty he is. Fishing for an alibi, Peter can manage only the preposterous, "I was cleaning the chimney." Aunt May says, "We have no chimney," and Peter, as if stunned, gasps, "What?"

That exchange—summoning memories of Humphrey Bogart telling Claude Rains in *Casablanca* that he came there for the waters and, on being reminded that they are in the desert, tersely replying, "I was misinformed"—also serves as a key to the Peter–Spidey duality in *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*. He's a Marvel superhero given strength and air power because of the arachnid goop in his veins, but Peter is also just a teenager flummoxed into an inane lie when a parental figure gets suspicious.

This conflict—preternatural man vs. confused kid—lent *The Amazing Spider-Man* its buoyancy and gravity when it appeared in 2012, just five years after Sam Raimi wrapped up his own Parker trilogy. It could have been a premature exhumation of a popular series. Instead, as directed by Marc Webb from a script by James Vanderbilt, Steve Kloves and Raimi regular Alvin Sargent, it reanimated and enriched the Spider-man legend.

The love of Peter for Gwen Stacy (Emma Stone) and, hardly less, for the aunt and uncle (Martin Sheen) who raised him, made the first *Amazing* both a budding romance and a family film, one that occasionally had to slap itself into action-movie mode for the obligatory villain—a questing researcher (Rhys Ifans) transformed by weird science into a giant lizard—and the battles to save an imperiled New York.

It would have been a good idea to build on this foundation and sustain the first movie's sweet mixture of domesticity and melodrama. But the sequel, again directed by Webb, from a screenplay by Alex Kurtzman, Roberto Orci and Jeff Pinkner, goes frantic and rote by turns, mislaying the power of the central love story and piling on the mutant adversaries. For at least this installment, Spider-Man is Amazing no more.

ASM2 begins cleverly: a mirror image of the first scene in the first movie, when young Peter's parents, Robert (Campbell Scott) and Mary (Embeth Davidtz), walked out forever, leaving the boy with just two parting words: "Be good." Then we were confronted with an abandoned child's sorry confusion; now we follow Robert and Mary on a secret mission in a private airplane. The teen Peter will track clues left by Robert to the source of the scientific breakthrough that got Dad in mortal trouble and made Son a cross-species hero.

Good start, but then it goes awry. Recall how, in the 2012 movie, Garfield brought the restless, borderline-weird intelligence of the young Tony Perkins to Peter, to complement Stone's wry, assured charm. Peter's and Gwen's teen stammering led to a great first kiss—on a rooftop, as he spins a web around her waist and pulls her to him—and a let's-go-flying consummation of their affections. (She calls him "Bug Boy.") Each of them is mourning a violent death in the family: Peter, his Uncle Ben; Gwen, her police-chief father (Dennis Leary). With his last breath, Captain Stacy coaxed a promise from Peter that Peter would not involve Gwen in his exploits.

In this installment, that vow ensnares Peter like a webbed

Clockwise from top left: Jamie Foxx as Max Dillon; the Green Goblin threatens Gwen Stacy as Spider-Man swings into action; Gwen and Peter in a quiet moment.

straitjacket. Forgetting that, at the end of the first film, he whispered to Gwen that broken promises "are the best kind," Peter mostly keeps her out of the action, which keeps the lively Stone out of much of the movie. There's also a silly career-crisis subplot: she's headed for Oxford University. His response should be, "That's okay, I'll go save England," but the two just mope, as if Spider-Man's power applies only in New York City, and fret that they'll be separated for years.

A less than worthy sequel to the 2012 picture, *ASM2* is more reminiscent of *Batman Forever* (1995) and *Batman & Robin* (1997), which, in the franchise's directorial wasteland between Tim Burton and Christopher Nolan, believed that the series could be extended simply by signing big stars to play new villains: Jim Carrey as the Riddler, Arnold Schwarzenegger as Mr. Freeze. The celebrity import here, Jamie Foxx, displays a downtrodden dweeb's comic poignancy as Max Dillon, brainy electrician at the maleficent multinational Oscorp (where Robert Parker did his work and Peter got bitten).

But Foxx disappears into the CGI effects when he becomes Electro, the monster who blows the circuits on Times Square. There's another evil creature, the armor-plated Rhino (Paul Giamatti), whose late arrival in the movie smacks of the screenwriters' desperation to make their action-scene quota.

Nor was it the most brilliant idea to reintroduce Oscorp founder Norman Osborn and his son, Harry—together they're the Green Goblin—from the Raimi films, in which they were played by Willem Dafoe and James Franco, respectively. Chris Cooper and Dane DeHaan add little to the old father-and-son sorcery: the old man blusters and the young man whines. DeHaan's tremulous-teen routine, like a Michael Cera with no sense of humor, usually works, but the troubled youth shtick is getting old. He's not a proper rival to Garfield, as Franco was to Tobey Maguire. And the Peter–Harry combustion is meant to be the core of the movie—one that forgot where its heart should be: with Peter and Gwen.

There's little doubt that *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* will make zillions as the first blockbuster of the summer season. But this is not so much a movie as a business proposition, less an event than a seat-filler; it lacks the clarity and emotion of its predecessor. As Aunt May could tell you, *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* is all smoke, no chimney.

CHAPTER THREE

A NEW ERA

SOARING INTO THE MARVEL CINEMATIC UNIVERSE, TOM HOLLAND PROVED A PERFECT SPIDEY

Tom Holland as Peter Parker in *Spider-Man: Homecoming*.

A HERO COMES HOME

Charming young Brit Tom Holland swooped into the Spidey costume with a gymnast's flourish and made the iconic character his own.

BY REBECCA ASCHER-WALSH

SOMETIMES PERSISTENCE CAN BE AS important as performance. In 2015, when Tom Holland heard about the search to cast the next Spider-Man, the British actor booked his plane tickets. Many, many plane tickets. Over the course of seven months he flew to Ireland, Canada and Belgium, taping a total of six auditions for *Captain America: Civil War*, which would be the first Marvel movie to incorporate the character. He traveled to L.A. to read for the casting director, went to Atlanta to test with Robert Downey Jr., and returned home to England only to circle back to Atlanta six weeks later to audition with Chris Evans.

There he decided to pull out all the stops. Putting his gymnastic and dance training to the test, the former star of London's West End musical production *Billy Elliot* offered to perform a Spider-Man-like flip. "Obviously if there is a time to show off, now is the time," Holland said. According to Evans, he met with some pushback, although only briefly. "Marvel doesn't want to see this kid break his neck, so everyone . . . was like, 'Don't!'" Evans remembered, but co-director Joe Russo "started salivating—'Just do it!'"

Holland stuck the landing and snagged the part—a fact he learned on Instagram before getting a call from Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige that he should appear on set only days later.

When Tobey Maguire kicked off the big-screen franchise in 2002, he had been contractually committed to only two films. This time around, Sony and Marvel Studios—which share rights to the on-screen character—weren't taking any chances with their new golden boy, who had beaten out such actors as Timothée Chalamet (*Call Me by Your Name*) and Asa Butterfield (*Sex Education*). Holland, the youngest actor to play the part at only 19 years old, was immediately signed to a six-picture deal. He would appear in three Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) productions as well as star in three standalone Spider-Man films.

First up was Marvel's *Captain America: Civil War*, starring Evans in his third iteration of the titular role, along with Robert Downey Jr. as Tony Stark/Iron Man, Scarlett Johansson as Natasha Romanoff/Black Widow, Chadwick Boseman playing T'Challa/Black Panther, Don Cheadle as Lieutenant James Rhodes/War Machine and Paul Bettany playing Vision. Directed by Anthony and Joe Russo, the film explores the rift among the Avengers, with Stark taking Parker on as a protégé. When it was released in May 2016, the film earned Holland critical nods and raked in more than $1.1 billion at the box office.

A year later Holland stepped onto center stage with *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, directed by Jon Watts (*Cop Car*). *Homecoming* picks up with Parker fresh off his Avengers adventure, navigating life back in Queens as a dorky high school sophomore and

Clockwise from top left: Spider-Man defies gravity; Spidey and MJ; on set are, from left, Holland, Happy Hogan actor Jon Favreau and director Jon Watts; Tony Stark acts as mentor to Peter.

getting smacked around by bad guy Adrian Toomes, aka Vulture (Michael Keaton). Downey Jr.'s Iron Man sticks around as the first MCU character to cross over into a Spider-Man film; Zendaya is Parker's friend and future love interest MJ, Marisa Tomei plays Aunt May, and Jacob Batalon is Parker's best friend, Ned Leeds. Filling out the cast are Jon Favreau as Happy Hogan, Gwyneth Paltrow as Pepper Potts and Donald Glover as Aaron Davis/Prowler.

Homecoming shrugs off the gloom of the earlier Spider-Man films, tossing aside the somewhat more tormented Tobey Maguire/Andrew Garfield Peter Parker persona and embracing the mentality of a goofy adolescent. "Yes, there's a lot of drama and conflict," Watts said, "but more than anything, it's about 'If you were that age and could do what he can do? That would be really fun.'" (Watts added plenty of his own fun to the film, including having Evans, in full Captain America costume, delivering messages to the high school students about a fitness challenge.) "Basically my version of Spider-Man is the worst Spider-Man ever," Holland said of the film's lighthearted approach. "He is actually not very good at being a superhero."

The overall humor, combined with sophisticated special effects, helped Holland make a dazzling debut as a leading man, with the film earning $880 million at the box office.

Two years later the cast and crew gathered to film *Spider-Man: Far From Home* (shot partially in England, with the set quite close to Holland's house). The sequel was again directed by Watts. "I think just not screwing up the first one was enough for them to be, 'Yeah, do it again,'" he joked. Playing the ambiguous Mysterio was Jake Gyllenhaal, who had been considered as Maguire's replacement in *Spider-Man 2*. Samuel L. Jackson signed on as Nick Fury, and J.K. Simmons reprised his role as J. Jonah Jameson, who publicly outs Parker's alter ego.

The script sends Parker and his classmates off on a glamorous trip through Europe, although Peter doesn't make it past Venice before he is forced to contend with evil, embodied this go-round by the Elementals. These new enemies gave the filmmakers the perfect excuse to design a "stealth suit," a chic black update of the Spidey getup that would become Holland's favored costume. "It's much comfier than the spandex," Holland admitted, "and it also looks pretty badass." Released in June 2019, *Far From Home* grossed more than $1.1 billion worldwide at the box office.

While there was a two-year lag between *Homecoming* and *Far From Home*, Holland wasn't out of character for long: between the release of the two movies, Holland joined the Marvel ensemble for 2018's *Avengers: Infinity War* and 2019's *Avengers: Endgame*. At one point it looked like the latter might be Holland's own endgame playing Spider-Man. Sony and Marvel's parent company, Disney, had a contentious relationship when it came to their financial partnership, and in 2019 they reached an impasse, briefly breaking up before coming to a mutually beneficial agreement. Said Holland at the time, "I'm just kind of like a kid . . . between two parents during an argument."

"I'VE LOVED EVERY MINUTE OF BEING A PART OF THIS AMAZING WORLD."
—TOM HOLLAND

With everything smoothed over between the studios, Watts stepped behind the cameras once again in October 2020 to direct Holland in *Spider-Man: No Way Home*. For the first time in cinematic history, Spider-Man is forced to deal with the consequences of his unmasking as Peter Parker—and the chaos it causes is far-reaching.

"[This] is something that Peter has never experienced before," Holland explained. "He's the most famous person in the world, but for the wrong reasons. The whole world thinks that he blew up the London Bridge. He's trying to navigate a life of fame, while also trying to get into college, trying to maintain a relationship with his friends [and] with his girlfriend. It's just a really interesting dynamic to throw at a 16-year-old superhero."

In the hope of getting back to his "normal" life, Peter visits Doctor Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch), asking him to cast a spell so that the world will forget he's the web-slinging hero. But Peter's continuing interruptions during the process corrupt Strange's spell—and ultimately open a portal to the multiverse.

The multiverse concept gave filmmakers the opportunity to honor the franchise's roots—and humor fans' nostalgia—by bringing back a veritable rogues' gallery of Spider-Man foes from previous movies,

Clockwise from left: In *No Way Home* Peter consults with Doctor Strange, setting off a catastrophic chain of events; Holland's Peter encounters Alfred Molina's Doc Ock and previous Peter Parkers played by Tobey Maguire and Andrew Garfield.

including Otto Octavius/Doc Ock (Alfred Molina), Norman Osborn/Green Goblin (Willem Defoe), Dr. Curt Connors/the Lizard (Rhys Ifans), Max Dillon/Electro (Jamie Foxx) and Flint Marko/Sandman (Thomas Haden Church).

And in one of the best-kept casting secrets (or perhaps worst kept, given the rampant speculation and rumors that had been spinning for months before release), *No Way Home* featured the epic team-up of all three big-screen Spider-Men: Maguire, Garfield and Holland, thrilling and delighting even the most casual of Spider-Man observers. The results? A critically acclaimed box office smash. Opening on December 17, 2021, *No Way Home* clinched the second-biggest domestic opening-day gross, with $121.5 million (behind only *Avengers: Endgame*), and it went on to earn $1.9 billion worldwide, making it the highest grossing Spider-Man movie.

But if fans were looking for a little closure as Holland wrapped up his Spider-Man trilogy, they likely didn't get it. The movie leaves Peter's future—including the fate of his relationship with an MIT-bound MJ—up in the air. And in this way, art was definitely imitating life. Because even though *No Way Home* marked the end of Holland's contracted run in the franchise, shortly after the film's opening, Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige confirmed a fourth film was in development.

For his part, Holland has said he was eager to don Spider-Man's spandex again. "I'll be there in a heartbeat. I've loved every minute of being a part of this amazing world." Spoken like a true hero. ●

FILM REVIEW

Teen Spirit

Introducing Tom Holland as a youthful Peter Parker, *Spider-Man: Homecoming* pitted the high school hero against sinister threats—and unruly hormones.

BY STEPHANIE ZACHAREK

WHENEVER ANYONE, usually a guy, defends the supremacy of modern-day comic book culture by pleading, “But comic books were my whole childhood!” you can hear my eye-rolling from here to Krypton. Except when it comes to Spider-Man. For some reason, surely an irrational one, a lingering affection for a nerdy boy superhero from Queens—one who can almost fully control his web-slinging capabilities—seems perfectly defensible.

But there’s a good reason the Spider-Man series has been rebooted twice since 2002, when Sam Raimi made the first movie foray into the Marvel character’s mythology: in our imagination Peter Parker remains, and always must be, a teenager. Even though a good actor can fake that youthfulness well into his twenties—both Tobey Maguire and Andrew Garfield pulled it off pretty convincingly—the shelf-life of this particular role is short. A Botoxed Spider-Man just won’t do.

Tom Holland, the young English actor who stars in Jon Watts’ likable if sometimes unwieldy *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, is everything Peter Parker/Spider-Man ought to be: charmingly awkward, light on his booted feet and youthful-looking enough to pass for a high school student. This Peter Parker schleps his backpack every weekday to Midtown School of Science and Technology. He gets crushes on fellow students, just like everybody else—this time he has his eye on tall, brainy, stunning Liz (Laura Harrier), a member, as he is, of the school’s Academic Decathlon team. He has other friends, like fellow nerd Ned (goofy-sweet Jacob Batalon) and Michelle, a sardonic young woman whose nose is buried in a book half the time. (She’s played, with a delightfully sullen insouciance, by Zendaya.)

The homecoming dance is coming up, and Peter Parker the boy would like to go with Liz, though she seems to like him only as a friend. Meanwhile, Peter is itching for any chance to become Spider-Man, and navigating the intricacies of that other identity isn’t easy. A local trucker, good guy turned bad Adrian Toomes (Michael Keaton), who moonlights as the black-feathered creature Vulture, has stolen a futuristic substance that’s easily weaponized, and he plans to use it for evil. Parker is on to him, but in trying to save the day, he hasn’t fully figured out the Spider-Man thing.

Costumed in his stretchy super-arachnid suit, he flips and flies through the air effortlessly one minute and falls with a splat the next. His bones appear to be made of rubber. He hardly gets hurt, as long as we’re not talking about his pride.

That buoyant naivete is key to this Spider-Man, and Holland brings it by the jittery bucketful. The movie around him is sometimes glancingly light. Other times it works way too aggressively at being entertainment, rather than just breathing. But Holland, as both Parker and Spidey, is always fun to watch: his bumbling uncertainty and boyish eagerness make him believable not just as a crime fighter but as a kid.

And like all kids, he’s awed by the mere idea of Spider-Man, even though he is Spider-Man: he’s fully invested in his own myth even though he hasn’t figured out how to build it yet. He makes nerdy video diaries of his nascent superhero exploits. He sends anxious text messages, hundreds of them, to his caretaker, Jon Favreau’s Happy

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***Spider-Man: Homecoming* foregrounded Peter Parker's struggles navigating high school as a young superhero. Top left, Peter with BFF Ned; bottom left, Peter with crush Liz.**

Hogan, begging to be taken out of school and sent on a mission. (Happy ignores each and every one.) And he eludes the stern eye of his boss, Tony Stark (Robert Downey Jr.), aka Iron Man, who has little patience for the spider-spud's fumbling: at one point, trying to foil an ATM robbery, Spidey inadvertently destroys his favorite neighborhood bodega (though he does manage to save the deli's owner and, perhaps just as important, the store's furry, big-bellied cat).

Watts—director of the 2015 crime thriller *Cop Car*—orchestrates some wonderful moments: one of them is the sight of Spider-Man balanced deftly atop the first car of the 7 train into Queens, riding high like a surfer conquering an unruly wave. But the real pleasures of *Homecoming* lie in its quieter moments and in the interplay between the actors. The movie's casting is pure New York, so casually racially mixed that you barely notice it, and once you do you don't give it a second thought. Why can't more movies be like this?

Here's another sly, smart casting choice: Marisa Tomei plays Peter's guardian, Aunt May, and she shall forever henceforth be known as Hot Aunt May. Come on: you know it, I know it, the movie knows it—her effect on the men around her, of which she's daffily, wonderfully unaware, is written right into the script. Tomei is a great comic presence, and the movie could use more of her.

One of the best sequences is a montage, set to the English Beat's gorgeous, wistful "Save It for Later," in which Aunt May helps Peter suit up for the homecoming dance, getting his sport coat to fit right and showing him, with the aid of an instructional video, how to tie a Windsor knot. It's a relief to see a superhero engaged in deeply human activities, like getting ready for a date with a girl he really likes. This Spider-Man is still just a kid, after all, and he has no energy for existential angst — just dealing with hormones is enough.

FILM REVIEW

The Kids Are Alright

Spider-Man: Far from Home is a delightful teen movie—the superhero stuff, not so much.

BY STEPHANIE ZACHAREK

SOMEWHERE ALONG THE path in the creation of the all-superhero-movies all-the-time universe in which we increasingly live, someone decided that big CGI battles were what viewers really wanted from these pictures. Marvel fans continually claim, believably so, that the characters are what they love most about the Marvel Cinematic Universe. But time and again, over and over, those characters are swept aside in favor of muddled sequences where a giant something or other stomps through a city or town. The superheroes are flitting around, sure, doing their best to stem the damage; obviously, they need a chance to flex their superpowers. But in these moments, the focus is never really

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Clockwise from left, Peter Parker's school trip is interrupted by strange happenings; Peter with Mysterio; Peter's pals Betty, Ned and MJ.

on them. And if these characters are appealing largely for the way they meld superhuman capabilities with garden-variety human frailty, these excruciating battle scenes—which seem to become more generic-looking with each new film—defeat the purpose. If you're going to a movie to see Spider-Man, why wouldn't you want more Spider-Man, instead of just more elaborate and increasingly routine CGI?

My one big wish for the 85 percent delightful *Spider-Man: Far from Home* would be more Peter Parker/Spider-Man (as played by Tom Holland, genial but never cloying) and much more of his sidekicks, particularly his defiantly elusive crush MJ (played by the captivating Zendaya). What I would like less of? A huge chunk of the movie's last third, which depicts in detail the invasion of a bunch of whatsits, served up with an accompaniment of virtual-reality flimflam, all of it the work of a group of masterminds who used to work for I-can't-tell-you-whom.

But until all that nonsense gets rolling, *Spider-Man: Far from Home* is breezy and enjoyable, focusing on all that's most appealing about Peter Parker and his web-slinging alter ego Spider-Man: chiefly, the fact that he's not yet out of his teens but has been vested with superpowers that he can't fully control. The symbolism is obvious. But the feelings of being a teenager out of step with your own body are universal enough to transcend any term-paper allegory. Maybe that's why people who don't much care for superheroes in general often harbor affection for Spider-Man, and for Peter Parker, a kid who welcomes the status that being an Avenger grants him but who still has trouble getting a date. Peter's guardian, Aunt May—played, in flash-of-genius casting, by Marisa Tomei—refers to his intuition about bad guys' hovering nearby as his "Peter tingle." It's so embarrassing, we cringe for him. But even he knows it's the thing that sets the men apart from the boys.

The regular old teenage stuff in *Far from Home* is great. Peter's chief aim, at the movie's start, is to get past the events in *Avengers: Endgame* (*Far from Home* treats most of that movie's self-seriousness as a frothy joke) and head off on a school trip to Europe. There, he hopes to win over the classmate he's long had a crush on, Zendaya's leggy and brainy MJ. Peter's closest friend, Ned (the marvelous Jacob Batalon), doesn't like this idea: he harbors the fantasy that he and Peter are going to be "American bachelors in Europe." But on the flight over, he falls for sweet A-student Betty (Angourie Rice)—it turns out he's really just a 19th-century gentleman in a teenage nerd's body. Ideally, that should leave Peter free to court MJ, though that's not how it shakes out.

And sure enough, on the tour's first stop—Venice, an ancient city of incomparable beauty—an angry monster appears, his battering limbs, his unstoppable torso, his roaring head all made of dirty canal water. Peter doesn't have all the correct Spider-Man accouterments with him and fails at vanquishing the creature. Another superhero, Mysterio, aka Quentin Beck (Jake Gyllenhaal), steps in and brings the beast to heel. Nick Fury (Samuel L. Jackson), who happens to have set up shop in some nearby deserted palazzo, tries to recruit Peter to fight future creatures—apparently, a bunch more are coming. Peter resists. He just wants to be a normal kid, on holiday. Beck sympathizes with him and offers lots of older-bro advice.

From Venice, the school group—which, incidentally, has the kind of multiracial makeup you'd see in an average New York City classroom—treks to Prague, where the two teacher-chaperones (Martin Starr and J.B. Smoove, both absurdly wonderful) surprise the kids with tickets to a four-hour opera. Meanwhile, Peter is distracted not only by monsters—which means he has to keep dashing off to do Spider-Man things—but also by lingering grief over the loss of his friend and mentor, Tony Stark. It doesn't help that a hotshot kid from his school, Brad (Remy Hii), keeps trying to move in on MJ.

The whole teenage soap opera is so pleasurable, and the performers so much fun to watch, that it's a drag when *Spider-Man: Far from Home* has to get down to the business of being a regular old superhero movie. The overbearing climax grinds on seemingly forever. But it's not quite enough to blot out the memory of what Peter and his friends are like when they're just allowed to be kids. In one of the picture's final moments, back in New York City, Peter finally gets to take MJ on a date. As Spider-Man, he scoops her up and they swing through the city, a mixed-up wonderland of traffic signals, construction scaffolding and lit-up signs. The night is young, and so are they. They're making their own song for swinging lovers.

Spider-Man: No Way Home **features a trio of Peter Parkers played by, from left, Tobey Maguire, Tom Holland and Andrew Garfield.**

All Together Now

Myriad MCU favorites pop up in *Spider-Man: No Way Home*—courtesy of the timeline-bending multiverse.

BY ELIANA DOCKTERMAN

CALL IT FAN SERVICE WRIT extra large. Once Tom Holland as Peter Parker accidentally breaks open the multiverse in *Spider-Man: No Way Home*, he invites in characters from the two Spider-Man franchises that preceded the *Homecoming* trilogy—making way for a whole host of familiar faces. Among them, yes, are Tobey Maguire and Andrew Garfield reprising their roles as two different Peter Parkers. (Maguire played Peter from 2002–2007 in Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* trilogy, Garfield from 2012–2014 in the *Amazing Spider-Man* movies.) In the movie's finale, the three Spider-Men battle some of the greatest Marvel villains of all time, including Doctor Octopus and the Green Goblin.

Why are all these people here? Well, after the villain Mysterio (Jake Gyllenhaal) revealed Peter's secret identity to the world at the end of *Spider-Man: Far From Home*, Peter's life got a little chaotic, leading him to ask Doctor Strange (Benedict Cumberbatch) to cast a spell to make (almost) everyone forget he's Spider-Man. But when things go awry, the Sorcerer Supreme inadvertently summons characters from other universes who know that Peter Parker is Spider-Man.

Hoping to put things right, Holland's Peter initially plans to round up the bad guys and return them to their parallel universes, but he quickly realizes that they are fated to die in their respective worlds. So, he decides to try to cure the physical and mental ailments that turned them evil before sending them back, rather than leaving the men to their doomed fates. But the task proves tremendously taxing, requiring some serious backup.

Here's a breakdown of every cameo in *Spider-Man: No Way Home*.

Spider-Man

TOBEY MAGUIRE

Three years before Christian Bale took on the role of a billionaire playboy–turned–vigilante in *Batman Begins* and six years before Robert Downey Jr. played, well, another billionaire playboy in *Iron Man*, Tobey Maguire ushered a broke kid from Queens named Peter Parker onto the big screen.

Last we saw Maguire's Peter in *Spider-Man 3*, he'd defeated Venom (Topher Grace), forgiven Uncle Ben's killer, a remorseful Flint Marko (Thomas Haden Church), and watched his best friend–turned–nemesis, Harry Osborn (James Franco), die in his arms. At this point he and MJ Watson (Kirsten Dunst) had broken up and gotten back together too many times to count, and it was unclear if MJ would stay with him. After all, she got kidnapped at least once a movie, and that had to be unpleasant. But in the last scene, the two share a dance and reconcile.

Spider-Man

ANDREW GARFIELD

Poor Andrew Garfield. His Spider-Man arc was kind of a bummer. At the end of *The Amazing Spider-Man 2* he fails to save the love of his life, Gwen Stacy (Emma Stone), from a deadly fall. Devastated, he hangs up the Spidey suit for about a year and visits Gwen's grave obsessively. Then, after months of grieving, he finally decides to watch an old video of her graduation speech about living in the moment (which feels suspiciously well-tailored to bucking up Peter at that particular moment, but I digress). Ready to resume his crime-fighting duties, Spider-Man valiantly returns to battle . . . only to face off against Paul Giamatti in a rhino suit doing a bad Russian accent. No wonder the third movie in this series was unceremoniously scuttled.

During *No Way Home*, when Maguire and Holland's Peters reminisce about fighting aliens, Garfield laments that his villains were lame. Still, Garfield delivers a soulful performance in *No Way Home*, reminding us he was a stellar Peter Parker, even if he starred in the least loved Spider-Man movies.

Green Goblin

WILLEM DAFOE

Norman Osborn (as played by Dafoe in Raimi's movies), a scientist and the father of Peter's best friend, Harry (James Franco), becomes the Green Goblin in Maguire's first Spider-Man outing after injecting himself with a supersoldier serum he has created. The serum drives him mad, and he develops a split personality.

The Green Goblin and Spider-Man fight shortly before they are both set to attend the same Thanksgiving dinner. During the battle, Green Goblin cuts Spider-Man's arm, and later, at dinner, Norman notices that Peter is bleeding from a fresh wound in the same spot. The Green Goblin and Spider-Man face off once more before the Green Goblin accidentally impales himself on his own jet glider. (Oops.)

Still, if any one baddie can claim villain supremacy in *No Way Home*, it's Green Goblin. Norman appeals to Aunt May's sense of decency while secretly plotting against Peter.

Doctor Octopus

ALFRED MOLINA

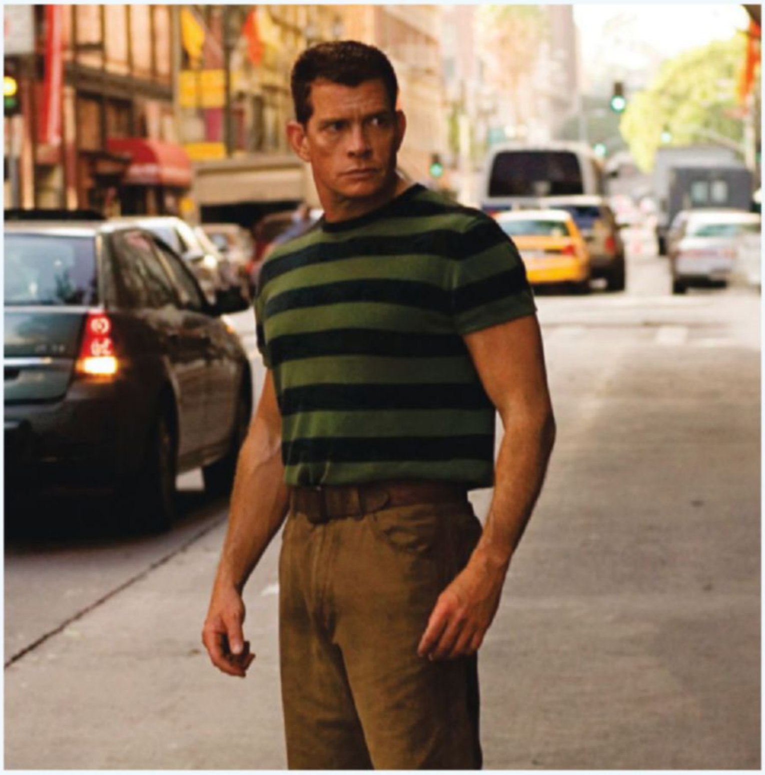
In *Spider-Man 2*, Molina's Dr. Otto Octavius builds mechanical arms to conduct an Oscorp-funded fusion reactor experiment that goes haywire, killing Octavius' wife. A chip that allows Octavius to control the arms with his mind is destroyed, and the arms begin to control Octavius. He becomes obsessed with finishing his experiment, no matter how many people the reactor kills.

At the end of *Spider-Man 2*, Maguire's Peter reveals that he is Spider-Man to Doctor Octopus in hopes of reaching the man inside the machine—and it works. Ock comes to his senses and sacrifices himself to destroy the reactor. But the Doc Ock who shows up in *No Way Home* has not yet come to the realization that the arc reactor he's designed is dangerous. Instead, he's intent on killing Spider-Man.

Sandman

THOMAS HADEN CHURCH

You might not remember the name Flint Marko, but he holds an integral place in Spider-Man lore as the robber who killed Peter Parker's Uncle Ben. Although Marko is arrested and sent to prison for the crime, he escapes, and while on the lam he accidentally falls into an experimental accelerator. The shape-shifting Sandman is born. Haden Church, known for his Oscar-nominated turn in the wine dramedy *Sideways*, played the character in *Spider-Man 3*, and at the end of the film Marko apologizes to Peter for murdering his beloved Ben. Securing Peter's forgiveness, he disintegrates into sand and is carried away by the wind, only to return in *No Way Home,* albeit in purely CGI form. His limited screen time (compared to, say, Goblin and Doc Ock), has sparked rumors that future big-screen appearances might be in store.



Electro

JAMIE FOXX

The third Tom Holland movie gives Foxx a serious glow-up—thank goodness. In *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*, the Oscar-winning actor starts out as a socially awkward nerd with a comb-over and bad glasses and evolves into . . . a blue floaty guy (but not a cool, blue floaty guy like Doctor Manhattan in HBO's *Watchmen* limited series). Like so many supervillains before him, Max Dillon (aka Electro) gets his powers by falling into something dangerous, in this case a vat of genetically modified electric eels. The film sees Electro challenge Garfield's Spider-Man to an epic battle at a power plant, but Spider-Man and Gwen Stacy together overload the power supply and make Electro vanish into thin air.

In *No Way Home*, Electro not only gets to look like a normal human—Lizard jokes about the character's "makeover"—but he also gets a personality transplant. The character is now basically just Jamie Foxx. Which is fine. Better, really.

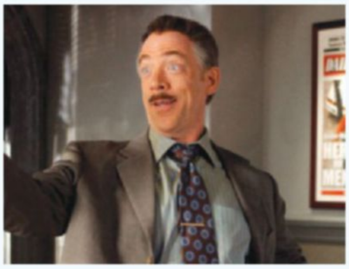
Still, when the newly amped up Electro prepares to battle Spidey, he's formidable enough that Tom Holland's Spider-Man needs assistance. Peter partners with a helpful Sandman, who, assuming the form of an enormous swirling cloud, smothers Dillon's powers, while Peter takes down nearby electrical towers.

Lizard

RHYS IFANS

Ifans reprises his *Amazing Spider-Man* role as Curt Connors, or the villainous Lizard. Connors is a scientist who, in a quest to regrow his missing arm, conducts an experiment that—you guessed it!—goes awry: he accidentally turns himself into a lizard-human hybrid. For some reason, this transformation also turns Connors evil.

He attempts to unleash a gaseous cloud version of his signature formula in New York, but Spider-Man foils Lizard's dastardly plan to make humanity scaly again. The hero transforms Connors back into a human using a special antidote, and he is carted off to police custody.



J. Jonah Jameson

J.K. SIMMONS

Unlike the other characters on this list, J. Jonah Jameson does not travel from a parallel universe, but J.K. Simmons does reprise his role from the Maguire series as the blowhard newsman who hates Spider-Man. There are a few differences, however: the Jameson in Maguire's world runs a newspaper; the one in Holland's world makes videos for a blog and (later) a TV station.

Why does the version of J. Jonah Jameson in Holland's world look the same as the one in Maguire's? Well, as the Marvel TV show *Loki* explains, "variants" of the same person can exist across many universes. So there might be two Jamesons. Or 20.

Daredevil

CHARLIE COX

Cox reprises his role as blind attorney-turned-vigilante Matthew Murdock in *No Way Home*, offering Peter legal advice after he's been accused of murdering Mysterio. During that meeting, someone throws a brick through Peter's window. Using his finely honed instincts, Murdoch catches it. "How did you do that?" asks an incredulous Peter. "I'm a very good lawyer," shoots back Murdock.

Murdock is clearly a good guy to have around: Cox brought back the character for the Disney+ TV series *She-Hulk*. He then headlined the streamer's *Daredevil: Born Again*, which just wrapped its second season.

Venom

TOM HARDY

Venom diehards hoping the villain might turn up midway through *No Way Home* to chomp off Lizard's head will leave feeling pretty disappointed. Eddie Brock, human host to the carnivorous alien symbiote who headlined his own movie trilogy for Sony, doesn't appear until the mid-credits scene. The sequence is less than two minutes long, but it's absolutely worth waiting for. In it, a bartender at a low-rent resort explains to an inebriated Brock (played as always by a go-for-broke Tom Hardy in cabana wear) that there are superheroes like Iron Man and Hulk in this universe—as well as "a purple alien that loves stones," clearly referring to Thanos. Intrigued, a curious Eddie mutters, "Hey, maybe I should go to New York and speak to this Spider-Man" . . . at which point he's sucked back into his own universe, without paying his tab. Womp womp.

But—wait for it—a tiny bit of black symbiote residue is left behind at the bar, threatening to potentially infect another unsuspecting host in Peter Parker's universe.

Clockwise from left: Tobey Maguire and Kirsten Dunst as Peter and Mary Jane; Emma Stone as Gwen; *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*'s Miles Morales.

Honorable Mentions

A handful of fan-favorite characters weren't on screen in *Spider-Man: No Way Home*, but that doesn't mean they went entirely overlooked.

BY ELIANA DOCKTERMAN

Mary Jane Watson

KIRSTEN DUNST

Dunst played Peter's lifelong love Mary Jane Watson in all three Sam Raimi films. Sadly, she does not appear in *No Way Home*—however, Maguire's Peter does offer a quick update on his relationship status. He says that while the couple has encountered their fair share of bumps, they nevertheless found a way to stay together. Hooray for love!

Gwen Stacy

EMMA STONE

Stone played Peter's girlfriend Gwen Stacy in the *Amazing Spider-Man* movies, but the character's tragic demise at the end of the second film left little room for her return. In many comic book runs, Peter falls for MJ after Gwen's death, but we learn in *No Way Home* that Garfield's Peter is still pining for Gwen. He does, however, find some solace saving Zendaya's MJ in the film's final act, tearfully catching her after she falls from the Statue of Liberty. He always was the emo-Spidey.

Miles Morales

In the final battle, after Garfield's Spider-Man cures Electro, the hero removes his mask so the two can share a chummy moment. Electro looks at Peter, disappointed. "You're from Queens, you help the poor. I thought you might be Black," Electro says. "Well, there's probably a Black Spider-Man out there somewhere."

And there is. Miles Morales, an Afro-Latino teen living in Brooklyn, has taken up the hero's mantle in comic books and in the Oscar-winning animated film *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-verse* and its sequel—and he also headlines a wildly popular video game.

Holland's Spider-Man movies have even hinted that Miles may exist in Holland's universe. In *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, Peter Parker meets the thief Aaron Davis, played by Donald Glover. Davis is canonically an antihero called the Prowler who also happens to be Miles' uncle. Davis mentions in the film that he has a young nephew. It's probably only a matter of time before Miles gets his own live-action film in the ever-expanding Spider-Man cinematic universe.

One can always hope.

In *Spider-Man: Brand New Day*, star Tom Holland explores new facets of the heroic character.

DAY BREAK

In the soaring new Spider-Man adventure, Tom Holland's Peter Parker grapples with growing pains while fighting crime full-time.

BY GINA McINTYRE

BEING SPIDER-MAN HAS NEVER BEEN easy. Juggling great power and great responsibility takes serious grit and commitment. Yet, 2026's *Spider-Man: Brand New Day* finds Peter in particularly dire straits. Grieving the loss of Aunt May and his mentor, Tony Stark, he's alone in the world, his best friends having forgotten him, thanks to some world-altering magic gone awry. Now fighting crime full-time, his efforts are compromised by sharp headaches—an extra bit of physical unpleasantness to further strain his wounded psyche.

"Living in the shadows is taking its toll on Peter," *Brand New Day* director Destin Daniel Cretton (*Wonder Man*, *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings*) recently told *Entertainment Weekly*. "Something is changing and maybe not for the better."

Fortunately, for Spider-Man fans, one of Peter Parker's most amazing superpowers is resilience, something he demonstrates repeatedly throughout *Brand New Day*. Set four years after the events of *No Way Home*, the film, written by Chris McKenna and Erik Sommers (the team behind Holland's previous Spidey movies), pits Peter against

> “HE CAPTURES HUMANITY [BY] WALKING THAT BEAUTIFUL LINE BETWEEN COMEDY AND DRAMA.”
>
> **—DESTIN DANIEL CRETTON, ON STAR TOM HOLLAND**

some of the most powerful threats he’s ever faced, Michael Mando’s Mac Gargan (aka the Scorpion), among them, even as he begins to undergo an unexpected physical evolution.

For both Cretton and actor Tom Holland, the chance to test the character physically, mentally and emotionally helped push *Brand New Day* into some exciting new dramatic territory. Holland, headlining his fourth outing as Spidey, has described the film as the “most emotional yet” and “the most grown-up.”

That tonal shift was intentional, Cretton says, though the filmmaker is careful to note that Peter hasn’t lost his inherent buoyancy and optimism.

“It’s not *Batman*,” Cretton notes. “Because Peter Parker is such an optimistic character, it is really a more interesting journey to watch him have to deal with the hard knocks of life. He’s working through sorrow and loneliness and trying to discover who he is without someone like Tony Stark to lean on. The way Tom plays this character—he’s such a real, in-the-moment actor. He captures humanity [by] walking that beautiful line between comedy and drama.”

Just like Bruce Wayne, however, Peter does use his superior intellect to design his own sophisticated gadgetry now that Stark can no longer supply him with cutting-edge tech. In addition to a

Clockwise from top left, Holland as Peter Parker; Spider-Man in an action scene that recalls his comic book exploits; the hero's terrible headaches suggest a future biological metamorphosis.

homemade fabricator capable of producing cool tools, he's created his own AI assistant, E.V. (which Cretton described to *EW* as "the closest thing Peter has to a friend").

His real friends are still around, of course, even if they don't initially remember Peter. *Spider-Man* regulars Zendaya and Jacob Batalon return in their respective roles as former girlfriend MJ and best pal Ned Leeds, and the *Brand New Day* cast also features MCU favorites, including Mark Ruffalo's Bruce Banner and Jon Bernthal's Frank Castle (aka the Punisher).

Joining them are newcomers including Liza Colón-Zayas (*The Bear*) and Tramell Tillman (*Severance*), as well as *Stranger Things*' star Sadie Sink in a top secret role that sparked considerable fan speculation in the lead-up to the film's release.

The A-list ensemble—along with lots of incredible onscreen action courtesy of Holland and a superb stunt team—makes for an exciting beginning to the next stage in Spider-Man's cinematic saga, Cretton says.

"I feel like the luckiest kid on earth to have been able to tell a new chapter of Peter Parker's life alongside Tom, Zendaya and a stellar team who have captured my heart," Cretton says. "The movie is about the necessity of community, and I couldn't have asked for a better group of passionate, kind, talented artists to help me tell this story . . . [Making *Brand New Day*] was a very positive fun experience for me." ●

Directing *Spider-Man: Brand New Day* allowed Destin Daniel Cretton to tap into a wellspring of inner creativity.

Brand New Director

Filmmaker Destin Daniel Cretton, on his reverence for Spider-Man as a relatable hero—and for Tom Holland as a gifted talent.

BY GINA McINTYRE

EVEN THOUGH DESTIN DANIEL Cretton directed Marvel's acclaimed martial arts fantasy, 2021's *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings,* starring Simu Liu, and co-created and executive produced the studio's inventive Disney+ series *Wonder Man*, the award-winning filmmaker isn't taking his Hollywood bona fides for granted. "It's funny to think that I'm a Marvel veteran," he says modestly during a recent Zoom interview. Of course, Cretton's latest endeavor, *Spider-Man: Brand New Day*, is set to burnish his comic book movie résumé even further.

With Jon Watts having stepped away from Spidey after directing the first three films starring Tom Holland as Peter Parker, the Hawaii native launches the next phase of the actor's MCU tenure. Cretton, who first won acclaim with his indie drama *Short Term 12*, recently shared some details with TIME about his approach to the action-packed blockbuster.

From left, Tom Holland, in costume as Spider-Man, prepares for a scene on the *Brand New Day* set; Holland waves to fans gathered to watch the film shoot.

TIME What was different for you about taking the reins of a Spider-Man film?

CRETTON Like many people, Spider-Man was maybe my first love in the superhero world. There is definitely a special nostalgia connected to it. I do think, as a filmmaker, the hardest thing, which is always the thing I'm trying to do, is to tap back into the creativity that I had as a kid—before I became tainted by the complications of the world and the industry. It was really exciting to be able to explore this particular character, because it did allow me to naturally tap into the imagination that I had when I was a kid.

What drew me to the project was where Jon left the character at the end of his last movie, which was already a place that felt very relatable to me, a place where Peter Parker is entirely alone for the first time. He is trying to figure out the real complications of life. He's working through tragedy. That was a great place to start.

You physically staged much of the action with live stunts. How challenging was that to do and why was that important?

We brought a lot of our stunt team from *Shang-Chi* onto the project [including] Peng Zhang, and we had an incredible stunt team in London. The goal was to try to get as much in camera as we possibly could. One of the draws to doing this Spider-Man movie was that we are seeing Spider-Man go back to basics. We're seeing a street-level Spider-Man, and we wanted that to be across the board. We kept talking about this idea of a "grounded movie." We were taking that mentality into the stunts, into the action design, to see Spider-Man doing things that feel almost possible and not to rely as heavily on VFX, though of course, we have an amazing VFX team.

Would you say that Tom Holland's physicality as an actor makes that more grounded approach easier to achieve?

Tom's physicality is amazing. I was not prepared for his level of precision, not just with stunts but with body movement. I think having trained for the stage as a dancer as a young child, his muscle memory and precision is unreal.

We have these scenes—you saw pieces of them in the trailer—[where we're doing these] super slow-mo shots that are replicating some of our favorite comic book covers. When Tom was doing some of them . . . he has to do a backflip or something, and it happens in one and a half seconds. We [would] watch it in slow-mo together to analyze [his position, and I would ask him], "Could you try to get your knee a little bit higher or be a little bit straighter or turn a little bit to match the pose of the cover?" To me it seemed impossible. I felt almost ridiculous asking him to try it. And he would just do it.

Why do you think Spider-Man means so much to so many people and what does that character mean to you now having made this film?

He definitely means something different to me now than when I was a kid. Growing up on Maui, there are superheroes to look up to and there are certain superheroes that you imagine yourself being. I think Spider-Man is one of those that's much easier to imagine yourself being. I attribute that to, he's a kid. It's very easy for me to imagine myself behind the mask [even though] I obviously don't naturally look like Peter Parker. I also think it's his imperfections, his ability to make mistakes, to stumble through life and be a bit clumsy. Behind all of that, he's trying really hard to understand what it means to be a good person and to try to be better.

We always need more examples of good people in the world.

I think so.

CHAPTER FOUR

A NEW UNIVERSE

MILES MORALES AND A HOST OF NEW CHARACTERS TEAMED UP ALONGSIDE PETER PARKER TO ENTERTAIN FANS ON FILM AND TV

Miles Morales is your friendly neighborhood Spider-Man . . . if you live on Earth-1610.

MILES AHEAD

Betting big on animation, Sony's *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* launched a spin-off franchise starring lovable Brooklyn teen Miles Morales.

BY KAYTI BURT

WHEN *THE AMAZING SPIDER-MAN 2* soft-flopped at the box office in 2014, Sony Pictures executives realized they needed a fresh start. By 2015, the studio had negotiated an unprecedented deal with Marvel Studios that would allow Spider-Man to become a part of the company's live-action cinematic universe. Meanwhile, in-house, they had set their sights on pursuing a new, arguably riskier creative direction—creating an animated Spider-Man film centering not on familiar hero Peter Parker, but a modern reimagining of the Spidey persona: Miles Morales.

"You have to put this into context: there was definitely not a need for more Spider-Man," said Bob Persichetti, who directed 2018's groundbreaking film *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* alongside Peter Ramsey and Rodney Rothman. "I think everybody had been pretty fatigued by it. But Kristine Belson, head of the studio at the time, said that [*The Lego Movie* creators] Phil Lord and Chris Miller were behind this one. So, there was immediately a different notion of what Spidey could be."

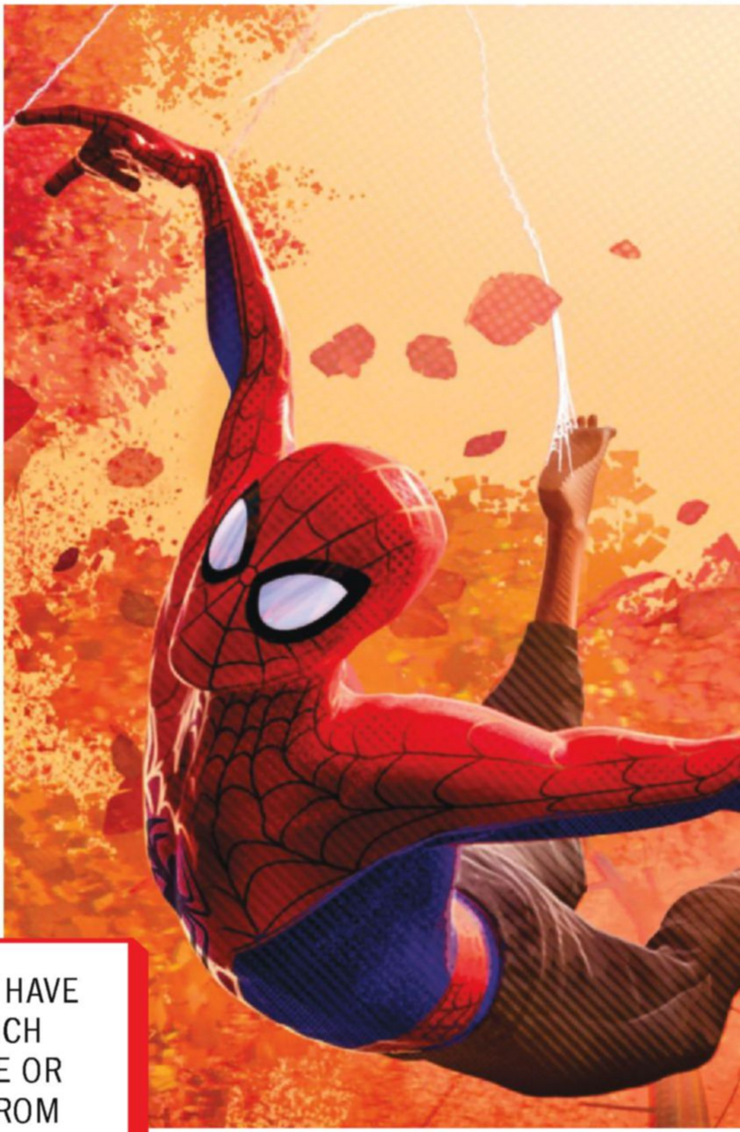
That different notion was built around form first. Working off foundational concept art from Alberto Mielgo, the look of *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* was grounded in the comic book aesthetic history of the web-slinger, and Marvel Comics more generally. The team, which reached 177 animators at peak production, combined hand-drawn comic techniques like half-toning, hatching and line work with the complexity of computer animation for a visual style that felt totally fresh.

But form is nothing without a good story, and there was no better character to anchor the new project than Miles Morales. Introduced by writer Brian Michael Bendis and artist Sara Pichelli in the comics in 2011, Miles is a Black and Puerto Rican teen living in the Brooklyn of Earth-1610, an alternate universe much like our own. "It's a version of Spider-Man that is just representative of what it's like in 2018 America or the world," said Perischetti.

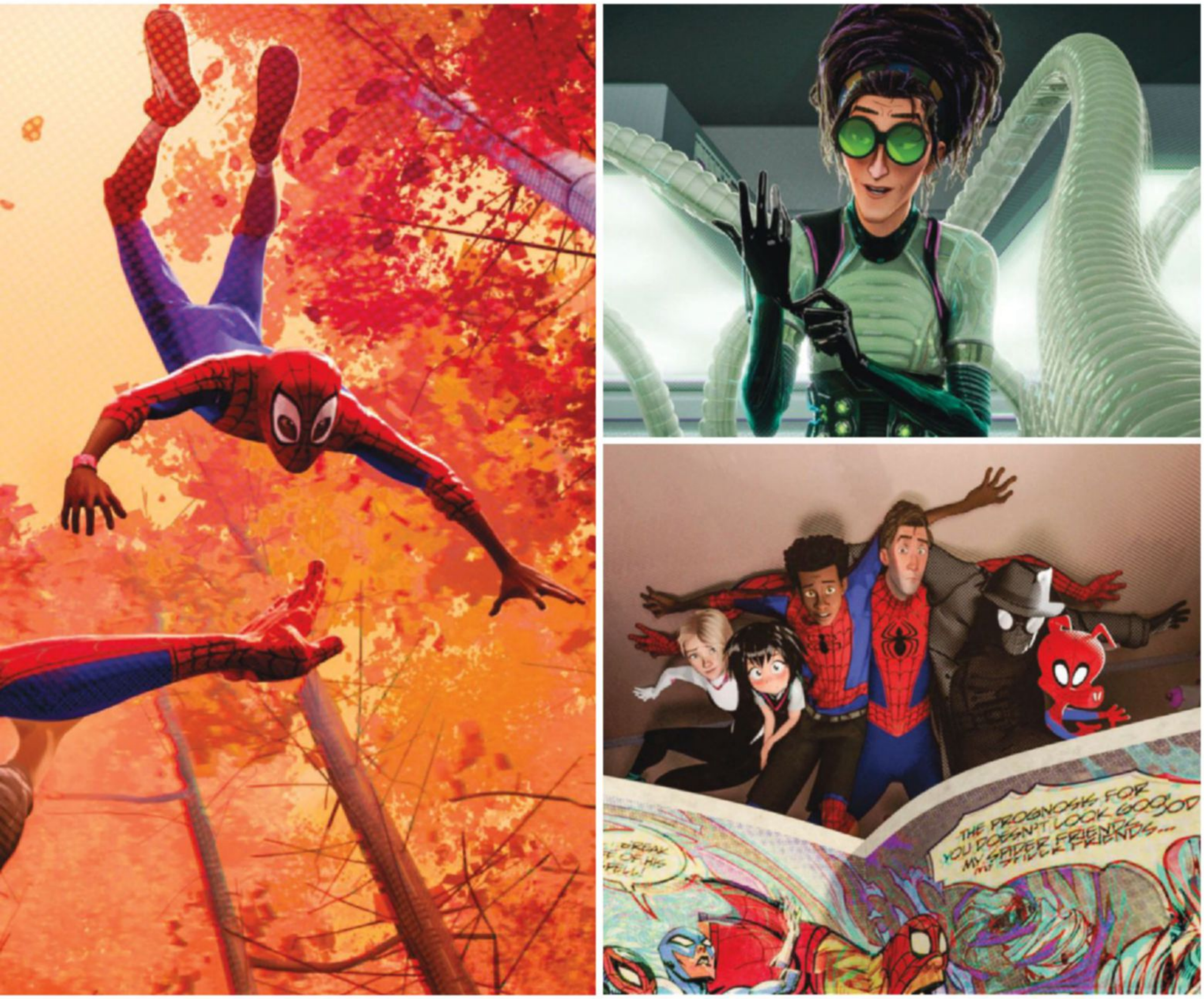
In *Into the Spider-Verse*, Miles becomes a reluctant Spider-Man when his own universe's Peter Parker (Chris Pine) is killed by crime boss Kingpin (Liev Schreiber). Unfortunately, Miles has no idea how to actually be the iconic hero. Enter Peter B. Parker (Jake Johnson), a down-and-out Spider-Man from Earth-616. This Peter becomes Miles' reluctant mentor, and the two set about trying to stop Kingpin from completing a collider that would allow the villain to travel to another universe—and would destroy New York City in the process.

As the walls between universes fracture, Miles and Peter B. Parker are joined by more alternate versions of the Spider-Man character from across the multiverse. John Mulaney voices Peter Porker, aka Spider-Ham, a talking animal Spider-Man from a cartoon-like universe. Kimiko Glenn voices Peni Parker, a manga-like, mecha-accompanied version of the character known as SP//dr. Nicolas Cage voices Spider-Man Noir, a Great Depression-era Spider-Man who spends his days battling gangsters. Each member of the Spider-Gang gets their own mini-backstory introduction filled with easter eggs for hardcore comic book fans.

To take on the leading role, the filmmakers were seeking an actor who could embody both the youthful spirit of a teenager and the gravitas of a burgeoning superhero. Although they held open casting calls in major U.S. cities, one specific voice caught their attention: Shameik Moore, who made his lead acting debut in 2015 coming-of-age dramedy *Dope*, a breakout hit at the Sundance Film Festival. "The vulnerability to him . . . I don't think anyone we heard could match it," said director Peter Ramsey. "I think we all thought and knew that if we put that together with a nice nuanced animated performance, you could get something magical." Moore got the gig. "I was first like, Whoa, is he Black? Who is this?! Where does that guy come in? He looks like me!" Moore said.



> "YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO BE A RICH BILLIONAIRE OR AN ALIEN FROM OUTER SPACE TO BE A HERO."
>
> **—CHRIS MILLER**

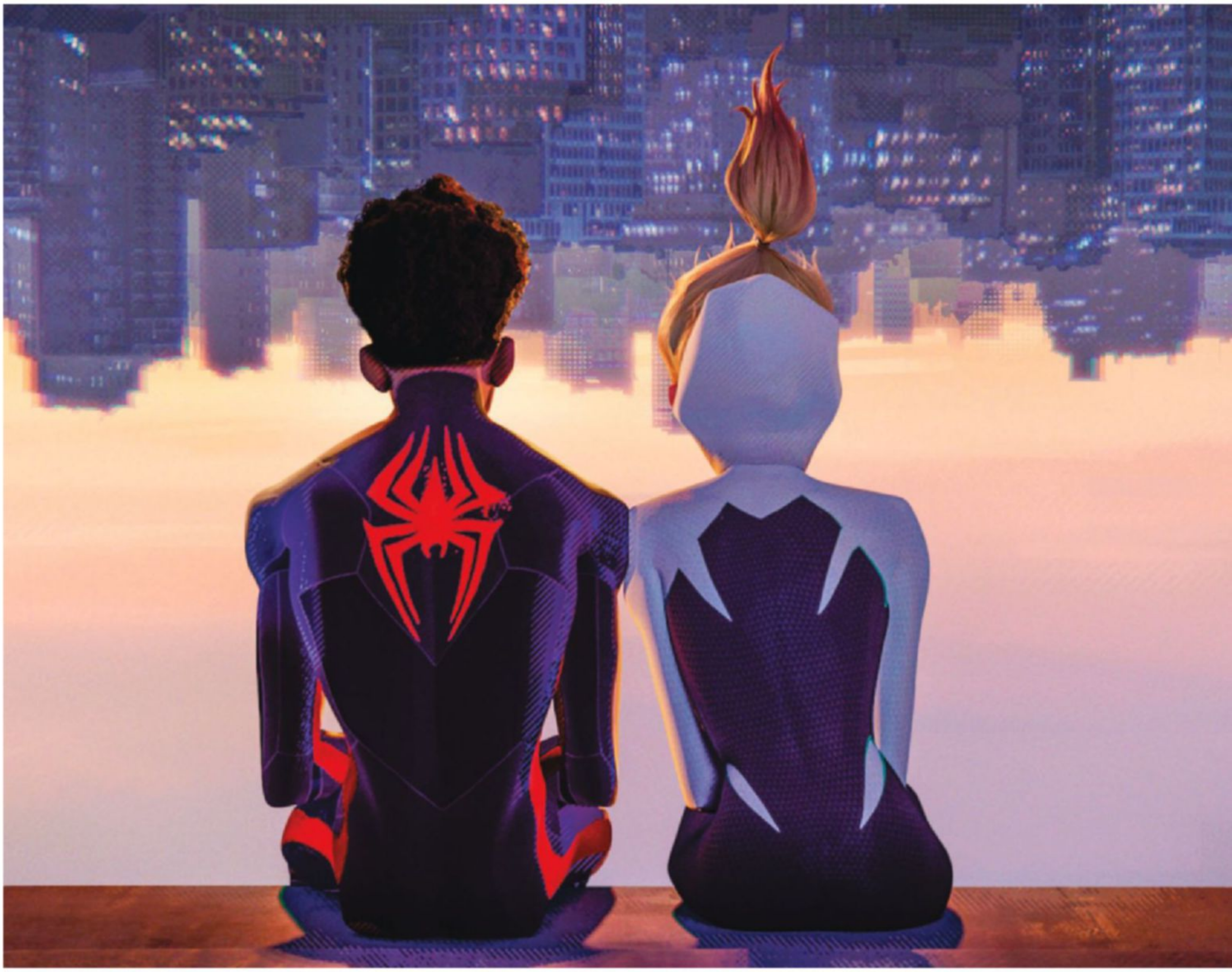

THE PROGNOSIS FOR YOU DOESN'T LOOK GOOOOD MY SPIDER FRIENDS...

Clockwise from left, Peter B. Parker's Spider-Man teams up with Miles Morales' hero; Olivia Octavius, aka Doc Ock; Miles and pals stick together.

While many of the various Spider-People play small, often comedic roles opposite Moore's Miles, Gwen Stacy (Hailee Steinfeld), aka Spider-Gwen or Spider-Woman, becomes a major character in the Spider-Verse. Pulled from Earth-65, she is one of Miles' closest friends and allies. (Her inclusion as a hero also subverts Gwen Stacy's onscreen history as a female character whose death serves to fuel boyfriend Peter Parker's broader narrative arc.)

Like Miles, Gwen underlines the movie's message that heroes can look like anyone. "We want young people to feel like you are powerful, and we are counting on you,'" said producer Chris Miller. "The idea that it was democratic—that you didn't have to be a rich billionaire or an alien from outer space to be a hero, that it could be anybody—was built in from day one."

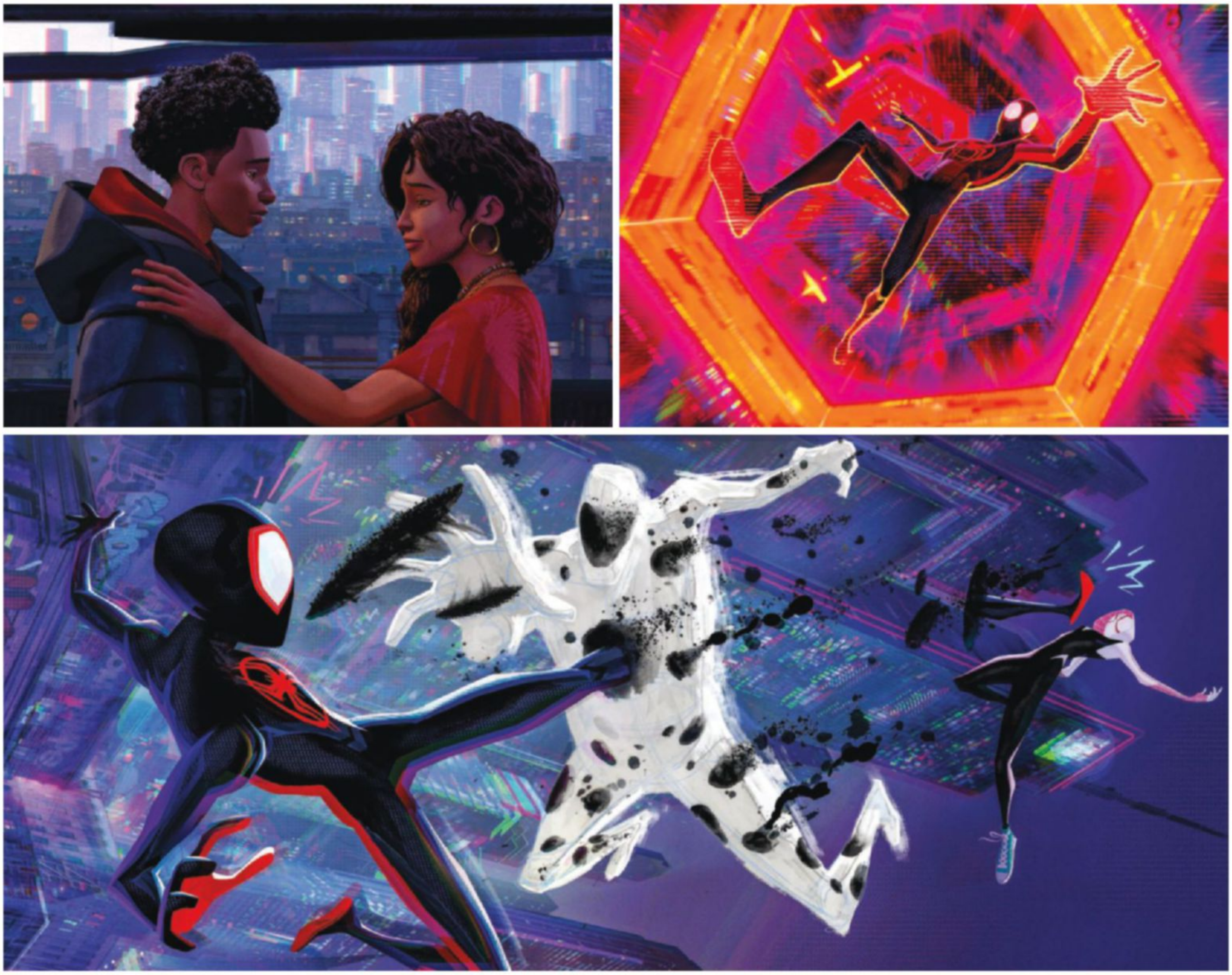
That theme struck a chord with audiences and critics alike. *Into the Spider-Verse* grossed $394 million at the global box office and won Best Animated Feature at the 91st Academy Awards. "I started getting emails from all these people, emails that make you cry, that the movie had so much meaning for them," said Perischetti of the overwhelming response.



After the massive success of *Into the Spider-Verse*, the creative team behind the franchise doubled down on their initial mission to push the accepted limits of mainstream animation with the 2023 sequel *Across the Spider-Verse*. "The first film opened the door, but we thought [*Across the Spider-Verse*] could kick down the door and start a bonfire—and hopefully wake up people who control the purse strings—as to how varied a film can look," said Miller.

Whereas *Into the Spider-Verse* experimented with different visual styles by pulling different versions of the Spider-Man character into Miles' world, *Across the Spider-verse* sends Miles on a high-stakes adventure across the multiverse. The approach necessitated the creation of six universes, each with its own unique visual language. Gwen's home universe, for example, is painted in a unique, watercolor style that fluctuates in color with the characters' emotions. "With Gwen and her dimension, it was really just an amazing opportunity to put on screen what she couldn't say with her words," said Justin K. Thompson, who directed the film alongside Joaquim Dos Santos and Kemp Powers. "If she can't cry, then let the paint drip down the walls and let the rooms cry for her."

Set 16 months after the events of *Into the Spider-Verse, Across the Spider-Verse* sees Miles struggling to balance his responsibilities as a high school student and son with his responsibilities as Spider-Man. Meanwhile, Gwen flees her own universe when a confession to her police captain father goes poorly.



Clockwise from left, Miles and Gwen Stacy gaze at the horizon; he shares a moment with his mom; Miles goes into the Spider-Verse; he fights the villainous Spot.

She joins up with the Spider-Society, a group of Spider-People tasked with keeping the multiverse in order. They are hot on the trail of the Spot (Jason Schwartzman), a scientist-turned-villain whose body was infused with interdimensional portals when Miles exploded the collider at the end of *Into the Spider-Verse*.

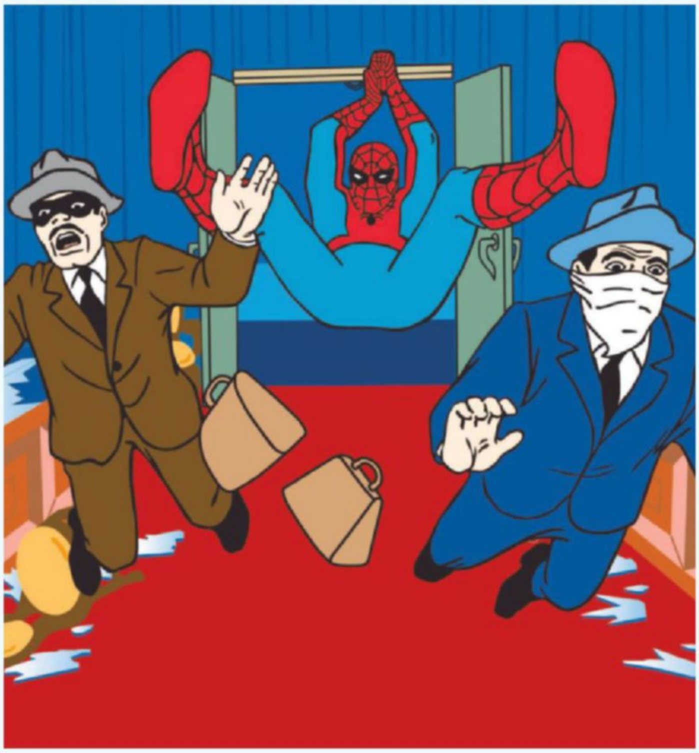
In their adventures, Miles and Gwen encounter new versions of Spider-Man that expand the Spider-Gang from the first film. Oscar Isaac voices Miguel O'Hara, the no-nonsense Spider-Man who leads the Spider-Society. Issa Rae voices Jessica Drew, a pregnant, motorcycle-driving Spider-Woman from Earth-332. Karan Soni voices Pavitr Prabhakar, aka Spider-Man India, who lives in Earth-50101's Mumbattan, and Daniel Kaluuya voices Hobie Brown, or Spider-Punk, an anarchist, anti-capitalist British rocker from Earth-138.

The film, which grossed more than $690 million at the box office, ends on a massive cliff-hanger that has fans desperate for the next installment, which Miller has called "the most emotional Spider-Verse film we have ever made." *Spider-Man: Beyond the Spider-Verse* is slated for release on June 18, 2027, with spin-off films *Spider-Woman* and *Spider-Punk* also in development. Looking back, it's clear taking a gamble on charming Miles Morales was a pretty safe bet after all. ●

As Seen on TV

Too popular to be confined to comics or movie theaters—or any other single medium—Spider-Man's groundbreaking television tenure is truly impressive.

FOR NEARLY HALF A CENTURY, Spider-Man has been slinging webs on TV. While most of his televised adventures have been in animated form, he was notably one of the first superheroes to have his own live-action drama series, in the late 1970s. Regardless of the format, all these shows have drawn on the deep reserves of Marvel lore and typically focus on Peter Parker's never-ending struggle to balance his personal life with the "great responsibility" of his crime-fighting gig—no easy job. Following are some of Spidey's most memorable appearances.



Spider-Man

1967–70

"Spider-Man, Spider-Man, does whatever a spider can. Spins a web, any size. Catches thieves just like flies . . ." The swinging theme song alone makes this a Saturday-morning cartoon classic, but perhaps the show's most enduring legacy has been the introduction of the "Spider-Man pointing" meme, from the episode "Double Identity," in which our hero confronts an imposter.

The Electric Company: "Spidey Super Stories"

1974–1977

The character made his live-action debut in these short, low-tech segments (some featuring a young Morgan Freeman!) from the beloved PBS kids show. Donning the costume was Danny Seagren, who "spoke" through comic book word balloons placed over his head and faced off against a less-than-imposing rogues gallery that included the Prankster, the Tickler and the Birthday Bandit.

The Amazing Spider-Man

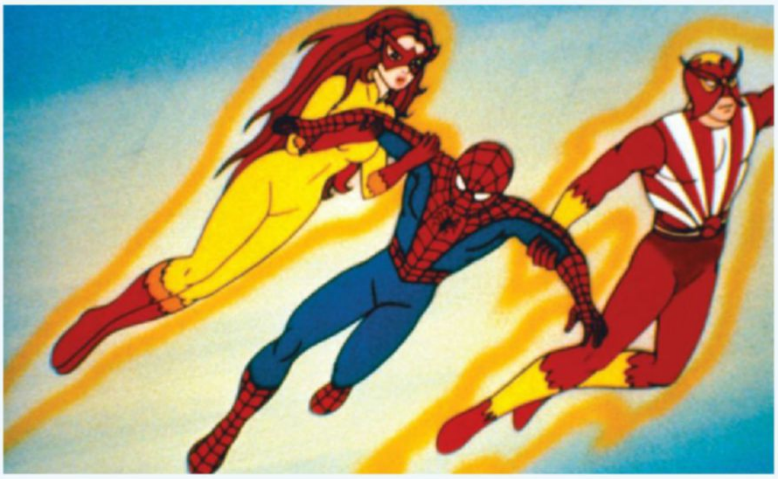
1977–79

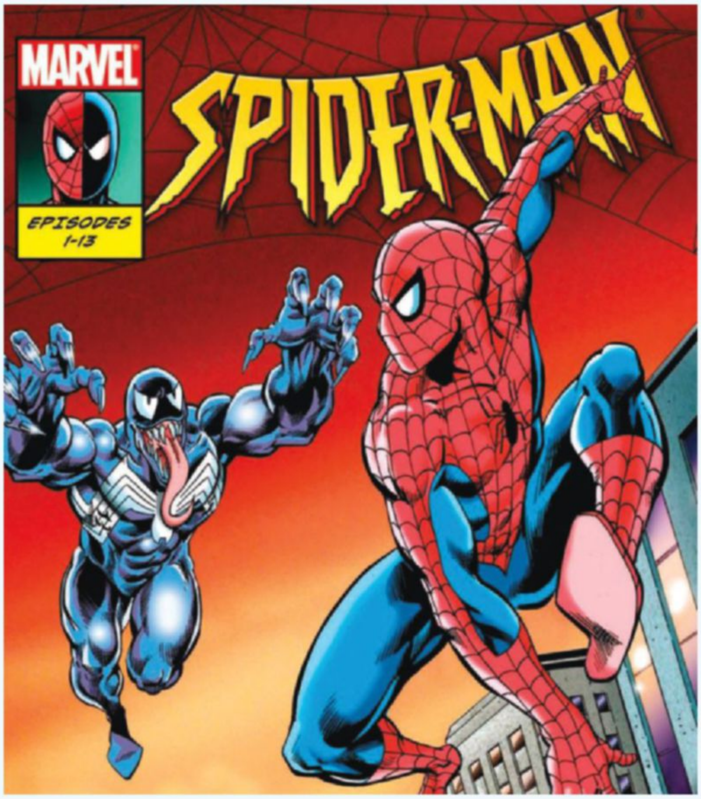
The first (and so far only) full-fledged live-action series began with a TV movie and then only lasted 13 episodes. The show may have been a little too grounded. “We did not have fantasy comic book villains,” star Nicholas Hammond told *The Hollywood Reporter* in 2021. “We had people, we had drug dealers, blackmailers, criminals. So in a way, we turned it slightly into a crime show, where there were issues about pollution and nuclear waste.”

Spider-Man and His Amazing Friends

1981–83

Looking to emulate the success of ABC's *Super Friends* cartoon, which featured a group of DC Comics heroes, NBC added this Saturday-morning animated series in which Spidey teams up with fellow crime fighters Iceman and Firestar, who, you guessed it, can control ice and fire, respectively. Iceman originated in the X-Men comics, but Firestar was created specifically for this show. (She eventually jumped to the comics in 1985.)





Spider-Man: The Animated Series

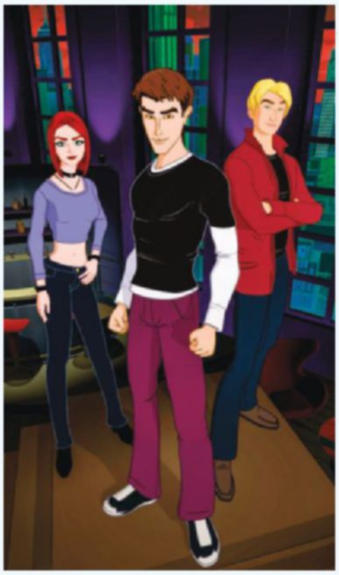
1994–98

This adaptation drew heavily on some of the more beloved comic book stories, told in serialized, multi-episode arcs. Christopher Daniel Barnes played Peter/Spidey, and the ensemble included Ed Asner as *Daily Bugle* editor J. Jonah Jameson and Mark Hamill as Hobgoblin. The final arc introduced the concept of the multiverse—decades before the "Spider-Verse" was introduced in comics and the animated film trilogy.

Spider-Man: The New Animated Series

2003

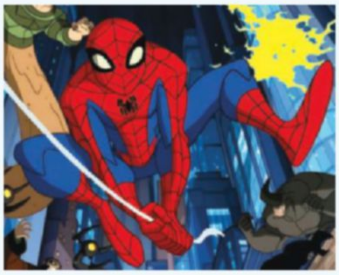
Continuing the story that began in Sam Raimi's 2002 film, Neil Patrick Harris took over for Tobey Maguire in this short-lived CGI-animated series for MTV. Lisa Loeb played Mary Jane Watson and *Beverly Hills, 90210*'s Ian Ziering took on the voice of Harry Osborn, who still believed that Spider-Man was responsible for the death of his father (aka the Green Goblin, who died in the movie while trying to kill Spider-Man).

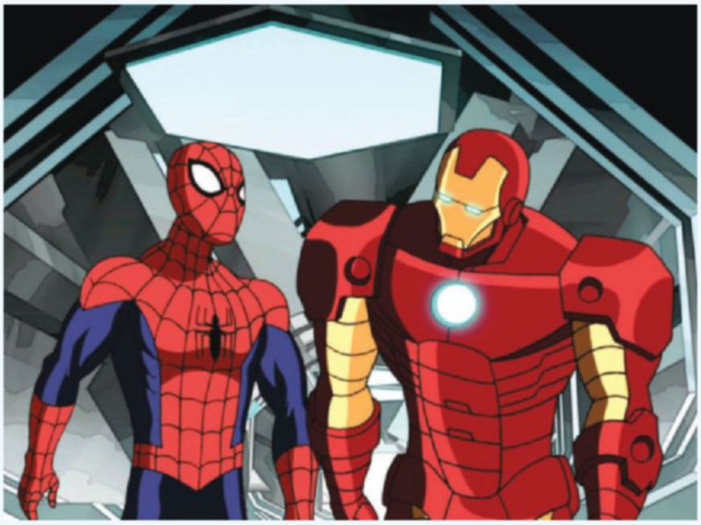


The Spectacular Spider-Man

2008–09

Though it aired only two seasons—its run reportedly halted due to complications stemming from Disney and Sony's agreement for the TV rights to the character—this cartoon is nevertheless beloved due in large part to the joy Peter experienced when in costume. "Life is tough as Peter Parker, but when he puts on the suit and he swings through the city, it's a huge release for him," supervising producer Greg Weisman told *TV Guide* in 2008.

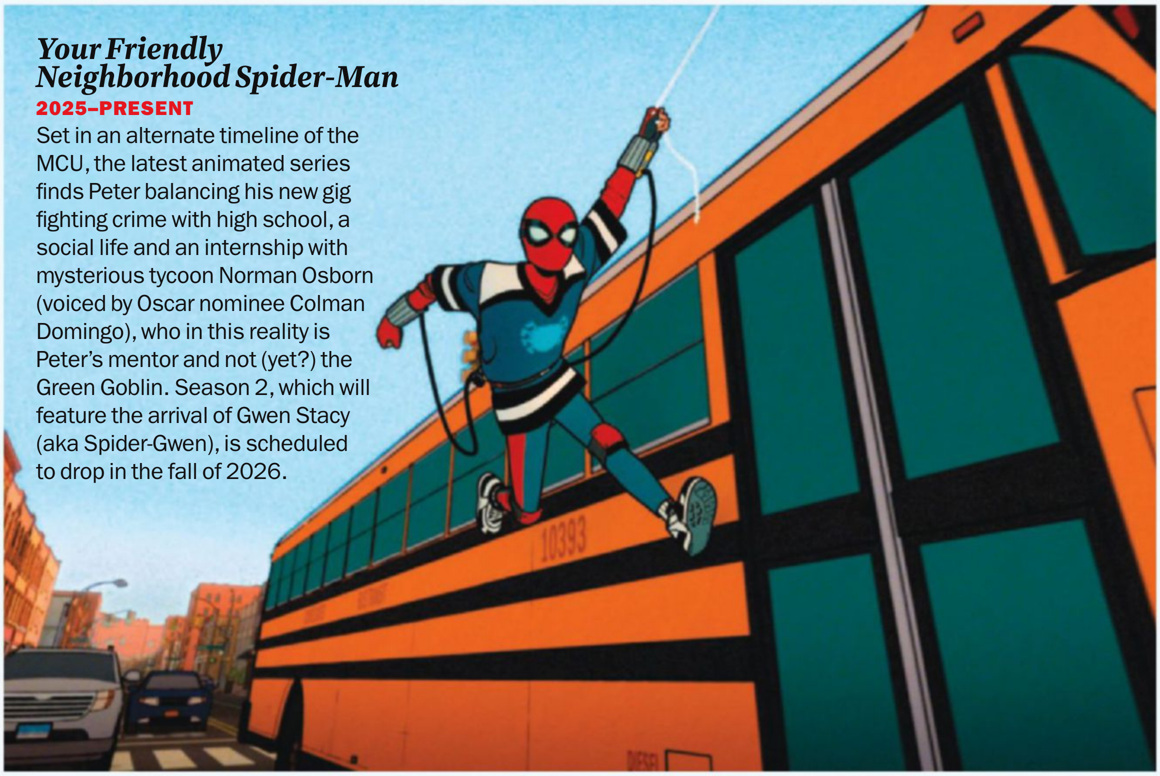




Ultimate Spider-Man

2012–17

The character's longest-running show—at 104 episodes—was inspired by writer Brian Michael Bendis' acclaimed comic series of the same name, which reinvented Spidey for a new generation. The show sees Spider-Man join the government agency S.H.I.E.L.D. and partner up with a group of other young heroes. In season 3 he travels into the Spider-Verse and meets Miles Morales, making his first animated appearance.



Your Friendly Neighborhood Spider-Man

2025–PRESENT

Set in an alternate timeline of the MCU, the latest animated series finds Peter balancing his new gig fighting crime with high school, a social life and an internship with mysterious tycoon Norman Osborn (voiced by Oscar nominee Colman Domingo), who in this reality is Peter's mentor and not (yet?) the Green Goblin. Season 2, which will feature the arrival of Gwen Stacy (aka Spider-Gwen), is scheduled to drop in the fall of 2026.

THE ODDEST COUPLE

In the *Venom* film trilogy, Tom Hardy plays an investigative reporter sharing his body with a bloodthirsty alien symbiote. The result? Three out-of-this-world blockbusters.

BY JAMES GREBEY

Tom Hardy's Eddie Brock must go to great lengths to keep the alien symbiote Venom from wreaking havoc.

When the character Venom first appeared in Marvel Comics back in 1984, he was little more than an all-black palette swap of Spider-Man's typically red-and-blue costume. Eventually, the alien that gave Peter Parker this new look and extra strength would appear as a stand-alone villain in his own right, but Venom's whole deal is that he's basically a dark Spider-Man doppelgänger. That should be hard to pull off in a movie that doesn't acknowledge the existence of Spider-Man.

Yet somehow 2018's *Venom* spawned an entire Spider-Man spin-off franchise for Sony, one without the presence of Peter Parker's web-slinging hero. It was a turn of events that few could have predicted, though the committed work of Tom Hardy, an Oscar nominee for his supporting turn in the historical drama *The Revenant*, as the possessed symbiote host Eddie Brock was singled out as special from the start.

"*Venom* has energy, style and Tom Hardy—all good things," TIME critic Stephanie Zacharek wrote in her review of *Venom*. "But it doesn't really make

“[TOM] HARDY, WITH HIS SENSITIVE, EVERYDUDE MUG, IS FUN TO WATCH.”
—TIME CRITIC STEPHANIE ZACHAREK

sense, a bad thing. It will earn some money at the box office and people will probably talk about it for a week, maybe two. This is as it should be: expending more energy on it would be overkill.” Except, somehow, the film spawned two sequels, showing a surprising amount of staying power in the pop culture conversation. Who could have guessed?

Executives at Sony were certainly hopeful that Venom would appeal not just to the avowed comic book moviegoer but also to the larger action film audience. The first production grew out of the company’s attempts to create an expanded live-action Spider-Man universe based on Marvel IP it had purchased years earlier. First to hit screens, *Venom* was followed by the likes of *Morbius*, *Madame Web* and *Kraven the Hunter*, all flops (see page 91).

In addition to a gonzo Hardy in the lead role, *Venom* had something those other films didn’t—widespread name recognition. With the possible exception of Harley Quinn, Venom is probably the most famous comic book supervillain to arise in the past 40 years, his celebrity bolstered by his appearance in Sam Raimi’s *Spider-Man 3*, played by Topher Grace. Hardy took the role to another level

Clockwise from left: Venom takes charge; Eddie Brock with girlfriend Anne, played by Michelle Williams; Carnage; Andy Serkis, left, directs Hardy on the set of *Let There Be Carnage*.

in his first solo outing as the intrepid, squeaky-voiced reporter who has the misfortune to come in contact with black alien slime.

"Hardy, with his sensitive, everydude mug, is fun to watch," Zacharek wrote of the film, which was directed by Ruben Fleischer (*Zombieland*). "Brock staggers through the city in which the story is set, San Francisco, arguing with his inner demon Venom about what they should eat next (humans or Tater Tots?)" Indeed, *Venom* and, to a certain extent, the sequels that followed—2021's *Venom: Let There Be Carnage* and 2024's *Venom: The Last Dance*—are offbeat buddy movies that take knowingly silly steps into romance territory as Eddie and his superpowered parasite Venom get into all sorts of antics together. It's the Odd Couple, but one of them is made of living goo and bites off people's heads.

To be clear, the Venom movies were never about complex superhero lore or puzzling out phantom connections to Spider-Man; they were a chance to see Hardy do some whack stuff with his silly, foulmouthed dark passenger. The breakout scene of the first film was when Eddie, going kinda nuts during the early days of his partnership with Venom, takes a refreshing bath in a posh restaurant's lobster tank (a moment Hardy improvised on set). Hardy himself co-wrote *Venom*'s sequel with Kelly Marcel. Directed by Andy Serkis, *Let There Be Carnage* memorably has Eddie and Venom's many tentacles trying—and largely failing—to make breakfast.

There are dance scenes and silly throwaway dialogue plus lots of charmingly dumb action in the Venom movies, but they all center around the surprisingly concrete relationship between a man and his symbiote (voiced by Hardy). The plots of all three movies border on nonsensical, with largely forgettable villains—Woody Harrelson's Carnage being the exception. The films' supporting casts are typically stacked with excellent performers, including Michelle Williams, Riz Ahmed, Jenny Slate and Chiwetel Ejiofor, but Eddie and Venom's goofy relationship was always center stage.

The limitations of the pairing start to show in *The Last Dance*, written and directed by Marcel from a story she and Hardy crafted. The movie assumes that the audience is fully in the tank (lobster or otherwise) for Eddie and Venom, and if your enthusiasm for their brand of humorous bickering happens to be waning, there is not much else on offer. The villain, Knull (Serkis), is a distant imprisoned threat who sends monsters after Eddie and Venom while they do shenanigans in the Nevada desert and encounter Ejiofor and Juno Temple in Area 51. Rhys Ifans (notably *not* reprising his *Amazing Spider-Man* role as Curt Connors) is an alien-loving hippie in a van with his granola family. It's a lot that doesn't add up to much for audiences who danced with Eddie and Venom twice before.

Still, *The Last Dance* managed to bring in nearly $480 million at the worldwide box office, to become the 11th highest grossing release of 2024. (*Venom* and *Let There Be Carnage* ranked as the seventh-highest-grossing movies of the years of their respective releases.) Even if the Venom series finally ran out of steam, you can't say Hardy and his collaborators didn't give it their all. If you don't have Spider-Man in your Spider-Man movie, you need to have something else—the makings of the most bizarre sci-fi action-adventure buddy comedy of all time is not a bad place to start. ●

"They bring out the very best and the very worst in each other," Tom Hardy told *Entertainment Weekly* of the relationship between Eddie Brock and his symbiote companion.

Clockwise from left, Dakota Johnson in *Madame Web*; Jared Leto as Morbius; Aaron Taylor-Johnson as Kraven the Hunter.

Diminishing Returns

While the Venom movies were hits, Sony's other attempts to spin off Spidey-related films featuring Marvel characters were much less successful.

BY GINA McINTYRE

Morbius

2022

Suffering from a rare blood disorder, biochemist Michael Morbius (Jared Leto) splices together bat and human DNA, and in an ill-advised experiment inadvertently transforms himself into a vampire. Attempting to stave off his cravings for human blood, he invents an artificial blood substitute, but it can only satisfy his thirst for so long. The film, which raked in $162 million globally, largely failed to satisfy audiences, though TIME critic Stephanie Zacharek had some kind words for Leto: "His performance here has a quietly vibrating vulnerability; he seems to have made at least a small emotional investment in this film, as if to keep it from sliding into total special-effects-laden soullessness."

Madame Web

2024

In New York in 2003, clairvoyant paramedic Cassandra "Cassie" Webb (Dakota Johnson) uses her abilities to protect a trio of teens (Sydney Sweeney, Isabela Merced and Celeste O'Connor). The film was essentially doomed following the release of a trailer that went viral thanks to Johnson's deadpan delivery of the line "He was in the Amazon with my mom when she was researching spiders right before she died"—much mocking ensued. Savaged by critics upon its release, *Madame Web* collected $100 million at the worldwide box office and quickly disappeared from theaters.

Kraven the Hunter

2024

A mere 10 months after *Madame Web*'s short-lived cinematic tenure, Aaron Taylor-Johnson bounded onto the big screen as Sergei Kravinoff, a predatory Russian assassin blessed with animalistic powers who faces down mortal enemy, the Rhino (Alessandro Nivola). Poor reviews and sluggish box office performance ($60 million worldwide) seemed to doom all future prospects for the extended Spidey universe. In February, however, Sony Pictures chairman and CEO Tom Rothman confirmed that the studio is planning a "fresh reboot" of the spin-off adventures.

Nicolas Cage stars as Ben Reilly, the masked hero at the heart of *Spider-Noir*.

DOUBLE IDENTITY

Nicolas Cage's troubled detective spins a tangled web as a conflicted hero in the 1930s-set *Spider-Noir.*

BY EMMA FERRARA

THE FIRST TIME NICOLAS CAGE PLAYED Spider-Man, or rather the 1930s private eye who goes by the moniker Spider-Noir, it was in the colorful adventure *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*. But the gumshoe hero is a supporting player no more. In the Amazon series *Spider-Noir* the Oscar-winning actor stars as Ben Reilly, a disillusioned loner who prowls the streets of Depression-era New York City fighting villains and grappling with the responsibility that comes along with superpowers.

Well-meaning teen from Queens, he's not. "This character's very different from the Peter Parker from the movies. He's older and jaded, and not afraid to punch a guy in the face drunkenly," *Spider-Noir* producer Chris Miller told *Esquire* in February 2026.

Miller recruited *Spider-Noir* creator and executive producer Oren Uziel to helm the production owing in part to Uziel's passion for the shadowy genre that inspired the character. His adaptation marries original storytelling and comic book lore: *Spider-Man Noir* No. 1, by David Hine, Fabrice

Clockwise from top: Cage as Reilly; Lamorne Morris as journalist Robbie Robertson; Li Jun Li as Cat Hardy.

Sapolsky and Carmine Di Giandomenico, debuted in 2008 and became a fast fan favorite.

The world is a dangerous place in the eight-episode series, with Reilly's trench coat and fedora–clad alter ego, known as the Spider, squaring off against Irish crime boss Silvermane (Brendan Gleeson) and other criminal antagonists including Megawatt (Andrew Lewis Caldwell), Sandman (Jack Huston) and Tombstone (Abraham Popoola). Li Jun Li appears as enigmatic nightclub singer Cat Hardy, the show's answer to classic Spider-Man antihero Black Cat, while Lamorne Morris portrays driven journalist Robbie Robertson.

"I think all of these characters are going to be familiar but different," Uziel told IGN. "We're in a world now where you can take the best parts of these characters and the characterizations that have come through Marvel and make them your own."

Notably, the series can be viewed in "authentic black & white" or "true-hue color." "I think teenage viewers will appreciate the color, but I also want them to have the option," Cage told *Esquire*. "If they want to experience the concept in black and white, maybe that would instill some interest in them to look at earlier movies and enjoy that as an art form." ●

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SPIDER-MAN

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Tom Holland posed with an army of Spider-Men during a 2017 appearance to promote the trailer for *Spider-Man: Homecoming*.

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May Day

Peter Parker loves his Aunt May—and for good reason. She's an endless source of support and encouragement, though she's not afraid to set him straight when required. Here are some of the actors who have brought the character to life. —GINA McINTYRE

Rosemary Harris

SAM RAIMI SPIDER-MAN TRILOGY

The Tony Award–winning British actress emphasized May's unfailing decency and kindness, famously noting to her beloved nephew, "I believe there's a hero in all of us." That applied to Harris, too, who did many of her own stunts for *Spider-Man 2*.

Sally Field

THE *AMAZING SPIDER-MAN* FILMS

The two-time Oscar winner played May with sass and resolve, enjoying an easy rapport with both Martin Sheen as Uncle Ben and Andrew Garfield as Peter. Field later bluntly assessed her experience in the films, but on screen, she's winning.

Marisa Tomei

JON WATTS' SPIDER-MAN TRILOGY/MCU

With her debut in *Captain America: Civil War*, Tomei, also an Oscar winner, became the youngest and most fashionable May to date. She also behaves the most authentically like a parental figure, calling out her teen charge when he goes MIA.

Linda Gary & Julie Bennett

SPIDER-MAN: THE ANIMATED SERIES

Busy voice actress Gary played an older May in the 1990s Spidey series, which saw her frequently targeted by Spidey's foes. Bennett stepped in following Gary's death in 1995.

Nancy Linari

MARVEL'S SPIDER-MAN

Linari played May in both the Disney XD series, *Spider-Man*, and the hit video game—the latter project requiring motion capture and facial capture work in addition to recording lines of dialogue. In both, her May is inspiring and selfless.

Lily Tomlin & Elizabeth Perkins

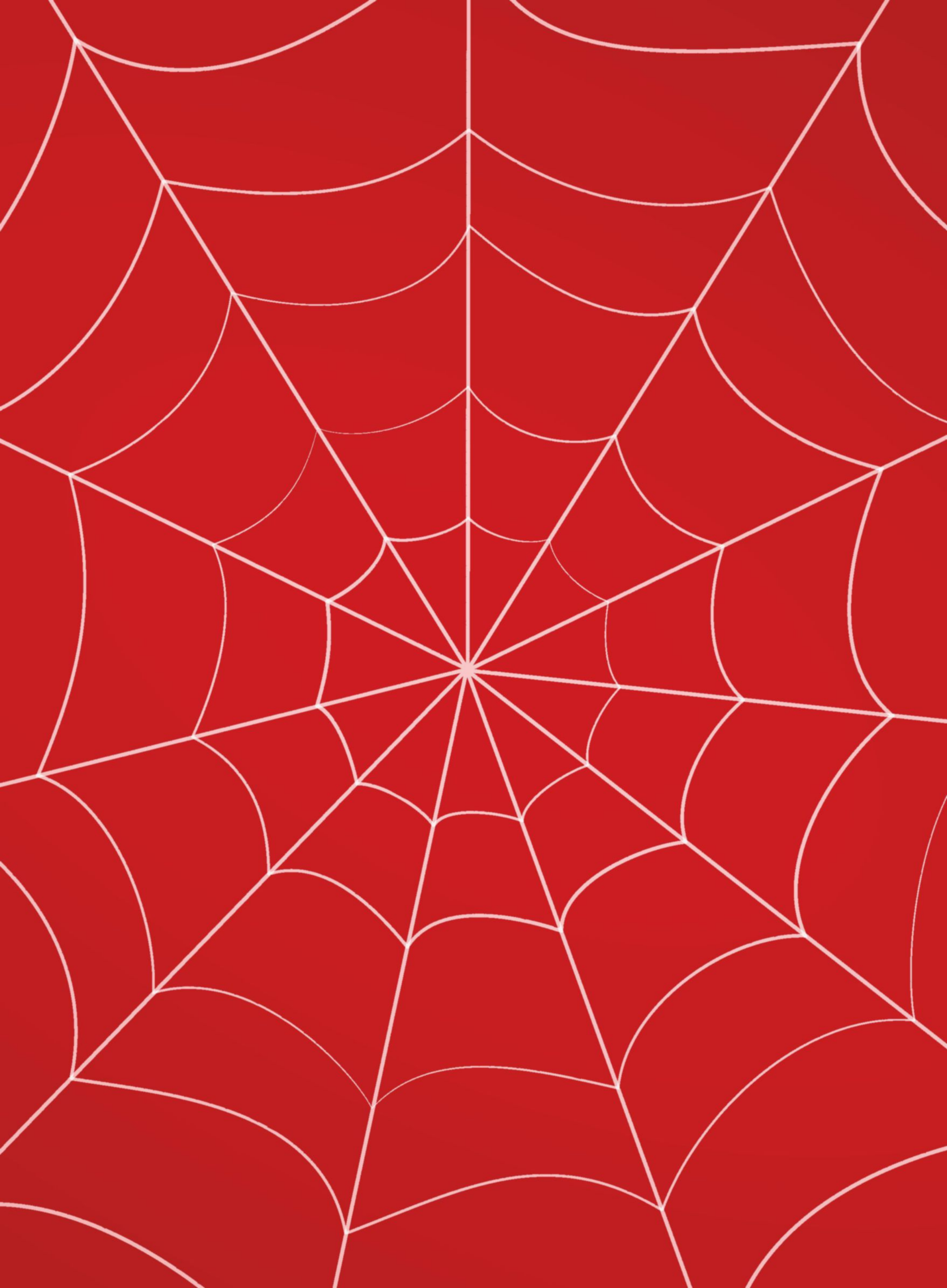
THE SPIDER-VERSE FILMS

Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse saw comedy legend Tomlin bring badass energy to Aunt May, a mentor to the young heroes. Perkins took on the character in the sequel.

Kari Wahlgren

YOUR FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOOD SPIDER-MAN

In the Disney+ series, the veteran voice actor is a younger May, widowed after losing husband Ben to illness. Wahlgren also voiced May (and Gwen Stacy) in 2013 video game *Lego Marvel Super Heroes*.



A HERO'S JOURNEY

For more than six decades, Spider-Man has won over legions of fans with fantastic adventures in comic books and on screen. From the character's early origins to his latest movie blockbuster, Spidey's amazing story can be found right here.

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